ISSUE 429 | NOVEMBER 2013

# DRAGON®

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

DRAGON®

# CONTENTS


**3 THE FOOD ISSUE**

***By Steve Winter***

Apparently, no one around here likes food.

**4 HISTORY CHECK: DARK ARROW KEEP**

***By R. A. Salvatore and Bryan Salvatore***

Dark Arrow Keep is a forbidding sight for those whose travels bring them to the land of the Many-Arrows tribe.

**10 WINNING RACES: HALF-ORCS OF THE MANY-ARROWS TRIBE**

***By Shawn Merwin***

No group benefited more from the peace between orcs and dwarves than the half-orcs from the Kingdom of Many-Arrows.

**16 THE 5×5 METHOD**

***By Dave Chalker***

The 5×5 method creates a vibrant network for linked adventures with minimal prep.

**21 UNEARTHED ARCANA: SNIPS OF SCALES AND DRAGON TAILS**

***By Alana Joli Abbott and Robert J. Schwalb***

A dragon's corpse provides many rewards for adventurers.

**26 BAZAAR OF THE BIZARRE: DINE ON THE WILD SIDE**

***By Peter Schaefer***

In all the distant and mystical places that exist across the realms, people eat the most amazing things.

**29 VILLAINOUS VARIETY**

***By Steve Winter***

Need a villain with a new twist? Draw some inspiration here.

**40 ALSIMUR DROON**

***By Ed Greenwood***

One of the most daring traders in Faerûn is the smiling half-orc Alsimur Droon.

**ON THE COVER:** *King Obould and Lurgros confront a frost giant during the recapture of Dark Arrow Keep.*

DRAGON®

429

DRAGON November 2013

| | |
|---|---|
| Senior Producer | **Christopher Perkins** |
| Producers | **Greg Bilsland, Steve Winter** |
| Managing Editor | **Miranda Horner** |
| Development and Editing Lead | **Jeremy Crawford** |
| Developer | **Chris Sims** |
| Senior Creative Director | **Jon Schindehette** |
| Art Director | **Kate Irwin** |
| Publishing Production Specialist | **Jessica Dubey** |
| Digital Studio Consultant | **Josh Dillard** |
| Contributing Authors | **Alana Joli Abbott, Dave Chalker, Ed Greenwood, Shawn Merwin, Bryan Salvatore, R. A. Salvatore, Peter Schaefer, Robert J. Schwalb** |
| Contributing Editors | **Michele Carter, Michael G. Ryan, Ray Vallese, Penny Williams** |
| Contributing Artists | **Kalman Andrasofszky, Zoltan Boros, Vincent Dutrait, Jesper Ejsing, Steve Ellis, Tyler Jacobson, Devon Cady-Lee, William O'Connor, Spikytiger, Matias Tapia, Beth Trott, Eric L. Williams, Kieran Yanner** |

Dungeons & Dragons, Wizards of the Coast, D&D Insider, their respective logos, D&D, *Dungeon*, and *Dragon* are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast LLC in the USA and other countries. ©2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC.

This material is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast LLC. This product is a work of fiction. Any similarity to actual people, organizations, places, or events is purely coincidental.



# The Food Issue

*By Steve Winter*

*No plan of battle survives contact with the enemy.*
—Helmuth von Moltke the Elder

The quote above is not what Moltke actually wrote, but since no one else has ever stepped up to take the blame, everyone gives him credit for this punchy, elegant statement. Moltke's actual words (in a close translation from German) were ". . . no plan of operations extends with any certainty beyond the first contact with the main hostile force." Less concise, less catchy, but also carrying a distinctly different meaning.

The point Moltke meant to drive home was that once the enemy gets involved, your primary plan of operation becomes less and less useful as chance, blunders, and enemy action diverge from what the plan expected. To counter that growing uncertainty, he stressed the importance of having many detailed contingency plans to cover the shifting events of war. Sadly, his meaning has largely been lost in the "refined" version of the statement, which is used more often to express exactly the opposite notion—that extensive planning is a waste of effort. The plan will fall apart as soon as the real battle starts, so why pour a lot of work into it? Let's just play it by ear and see what happens.

It's probably worth pointing out that the two wars Moltke planned as chief of the Prussian general staff, the Austro-Prussian War and the Franco-Prussian War, were smashing victories for Prussia.

Earlier this year, when Chris Perkins, Greg Bilsland, and I were planning the themes and contents for *Dragon's* 2013 issues, we intended to make food the November theme. We had a handful of outlines for juicy food-related articles plus seeds for a few more. But as drafts of the articles came in, either the mechanical aspects didn't blend flavorfully, or the nutritional value was drained away, or the result turned out to be less appealing than the recipe made it sound. When we put out a call for more food-related pitches, no one stepped up to the stove. In the end, the plan didn't survive contact with the writing process. Only two articles from that original lineup made it into this issue: "Snips of Scales and Dragon's Tails" and "Dine on the Wild Side." We're more than pleased to have them, but those two alone do not a meal make.

In hindsight, we're big enough to admit that planning an entire issue of *Dragon* around a food theme probably wasn't the best idea we've ever had.

Still, it's an ill wind that blows no good. Losing the featured food articles cleared the way for us to shine a spotlight on another tasty topic: the orcs of Faerûn's frozen North. The timing coincided nicely with the November release of *Legacy of the Crystal Shard*. A history check of Dark Arrow Keep by best-selling author R. A. Salvatore and Bryan Salvatore and a *Winning Races* treatment of the half-orcs of the Many Arrows tribe by Shawn Merwin add a piquant accent for those who enjoy flavorful, northern adventure.

On an unrelated note, this is my final *Dragon* editorial. My contract to produce the magazines is wrapping up in almost perfect unison with the magazines going on hiatus, and Greg Bilsland has volunteered to pen next month's editorial. So until we meet again—*bon appetit!*

# History Check: Dark Arrow Keep

*By R. A. Salvatore and Bryan Salvatore*

*Illustrations by Zoltan Boros and Tyler Jacobson*

The political heart of the orc kingdom known as Many-Arrows, Dark Arrow Keep is a forbidding sight for those whose travels bring them to its gates. The capital's dark, low walls dominate the Upper Surbin Vale, making this area the ideal corridor for the orcs who dwell in the Spine of the World Mountains to move down into more civilized lands.

## Description

Dark Arrow Keep stands among the foothills of the Spine of the World Mountains, approximately 40 miles north of Mithral Hall, near the banks of the Surbin River. Clearly built for defense, the city is enclosed by a high wall of rubble and earthworks, with a log palisade atop it. The main gates face down toward the Surbin River, some three miles away, and are reinforced with iron.

Inside the palisade, Dark Arrow Keep is a sprawling, chaotic mess. Crude tents vastly outnumber the

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

permanent stone and wooden structures, giving the entire city the feel of a refugee camp. Except for the wide avenue running from the main gates to the Inner Keep, the complex has no planned streets; roads are wherever nobody has decided to pitch a tent. More than two thousand orcs live inside these walls, and the entire area stinks of refuse and offal.

Most of the permanent structures are crude stone-and-wood buildings with dirt or stone floors, poor lighting, and few or no windows. Walls are often placed at seemingly random angles, creating a mazelike impression, though few buildings are large enough to pose any serious risk of getting lost inside. The placement of walls combined with the low ceilings creates an overall feeling of claustrophobia. Even dwarven halls feel open and airy by contrast.

Dark Arrow Keep is the industrial heart of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows, and its residents have a particular specialty in ironworking. The city hosts more than two dozen forges, many of which are housed in extensive compounds and employ dozens of orcs in the creation of iron goods. Iron ore is plentiful, mined from the Spine of the World and brought down to Dark Arrow Keep in regular caravans. Orc iron is crude but effective, reflecting the orcs' dedication to functionality over aesthetics.

## The Citadel

King Obould's Citadel is by far the largest structure within the walls of Dark Arrow Keep. Built under King Obould I, the Citadel is an enormous, circular structure standing near the center of the complex. The building is principally constructed of stone, with wooden accents and iron reinforcement.

The Citadel serves as the political focus point for the entire Kingdom of Many-Arrows. Members of the Obould dynasty have traditionally made their homes within this heavily fortified structure, and that custom continues to this day. The present King Obould XVII, his eldest son Lorgru, and no fewer than sixteen of Obould's other children currently reside there.

The Citadel's architecture is somewhat more organized than that of most orc structures, but it still seems dark and confined to outsiders. The entire building radiates out from Obould's throne room. This enormous chamber is the largest open space anywhere inside the walls of Dark Arrow Keep, though the huge wooden columns lining the walls make it difficult to see from one end to the other.

The original King Obould and his entire line have been atypically benign rulers (for orcs). Even so, orc politics are violent and unpredictable, and the greatest threat to any orc king always comes from his own subjects. Therefore, the Citadel is constructed as a fortress within a fortress to serve as the ruling king's last defense against coups. Rulers handpick the Citadel guards both for their strength and for their loyalty to the Obould dynasty. A considerable force of guards resides within the Citadel, to provide round-the-clock protection for the royal family. Siege weapons adorn the outer walls, and the basements within the structure hold enough stored food for the residents to survive a lengthy siege.

## The Pit

Perhaps the most notorious feature of Dark Arrow Keep, the Pit is a small, deep arena set among several heavily reinforced buildings adjacent to Obould's Citadel. The Pit serves as the primary court for enforcing orc justice, such as it is.

Orc law is brutal and to the point. Orcs within the keep can get away with almost any crime, provided that they don't attract the attention of Obould or any of the most powerful chieftains. Orcs fight and even kill each other all the time here without any punishment at all. But an orc who gets in a chieftain's way faces immediate and brutal punishment—he or she is tossed into the Pit with a single weapon to fight some monster.

The heavily built stone structures adjoining the Pit house a variety of dangerous creatures, including ogres, trolls, and hill giants, as well as a few more exotic creatures. The orcs treat these captive monsters brutally, then turn them loose in the Pit to fight individual orcs to the death. An orc who somehow prevails over the monster goes free, though such instances are rare.

Exceptions to the normal Pit rules do occur, though, particularly when politics come into play. King Obould makes the final decisions about the use of the Pit and the selection of opponents. An accused orc who is particularly valuable, or an offense that is particularly slight, draws an easier opponent. Other orc chieftains exercise enough influence that Obould must sometimes place a valuable underling in the Pit. In such cases, Obould's retainers usually weaken the monster with subtle poison. Conversely, any accused orc whom Obould deems too dangerous to live gets the same subtle poisoning, thereby ensuring a quick and gruesome demise.

Thus, the Obould dynasty wields the Pit as an instrument of political power. This method of punishment provides the king with an expedient way to get rid of both dangerous underlings and political rivals.

## The Bazaar

Dark Arrow Keep is the trading center of Many-Arrows—indeed, it is the only real trading hub in the entire kingdom. Merchant caravans from Silverymoon and Sundabar make the journey to Dark Arrow Keep regularly, laden with trade goods. Rather than moving within the walls of the keep, however, the caravans stop at the Bazaar.

Built around a central marketplace, this small tent community lies a few hundred yards down the road from the fortress, among the trunks of a stand of large pine trees. Human, elf, and dwarf traders maintain the area, so the community here is much more organized than that of the keep. Most of the tents in the

Bazaar are of human or elf make, so they are more colorful and of higher quality than the orc tents made of rough hides that are common within the walls of the keep. While the area wouldn't pass as clean or attractive by any more civilized standards, it provides a stark contrast to the grime and refuse common within the walls of Dark Arrow Keep proper.

The Bazaar operates seasonally. No traders are willing to live among the unpredictable orcs year round, so the trading community has erected no permanent structures. The trading season begins in Mirtul (the fifth month of the year), and it runs through the summer, with the last caravans departing by the beginning of Marpenoth (the tenth month). Throughout this period of time, caravans roll into the Bazaar regularly. Each caravan stays no more than a week or so, selling goods directly to orcs, purchasing and loading the few orc goods that can fetch a decent price in the south, and then departing as quickly as possible. Even in the best of times, orcs are dangerous and unpredictable, so caravan drivers try to avoid lengthy stays here.

## Personalities

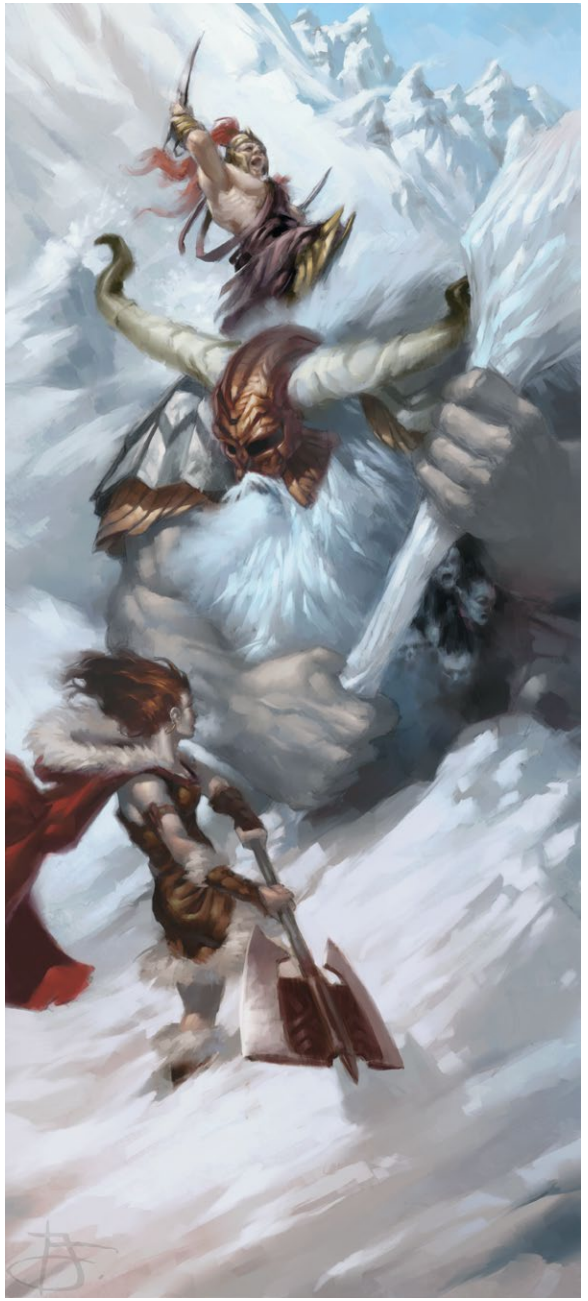
**King Obould XVII**, the reigning king of Many-Arrows, rules from the Citadel at the heart of Dark Arrow Keep. Obould continues the policies set by his distant ancestor King Obould I, pursuing an agenda of continued peace and mutually profitable trade relationships with the surrounding towns. Even so, Obould is no pacifist—he meets threats from his political opponents with typical orc brutality. Indeed, those who know him best understand that his main interest lies in expanding his own power, and he has simply convinced himself that securing his kingdom's place within the Silver Marches is the best means to that end.

So, too, believes **Lorgru**, the eldest son of King Obould XVII and the presumptive heir to the throne of Many-Arrows. Lorgru's reputation for compassion exceeds even his father's—a fact that invites much scorn from his future subjects. Some, however, believe that Lorgru's compassion is just a ploy—a way for him to retain his position of prominence in his father's eyes. Such a theory is logical given the public perception that Obould XVII is fanatically dedicated to making Many-Arrows a peaceful and prosperous neighbor to the other kingdoms in Luruar—the vision of his ancestor, King Obould I.

In early 1484 DR, a minor incident with unforeseen wide-reaching implications brought Lorgru to the center of a coming political storm. An orc patrol caught wind of a pair of elves—one surface, one drow—moving unbidden and uninvited through the Kingdom of Many-Arrows. The orcs caught up with the pair at the entrance to a high cave in the mountains—a cavern that would lead to the Underdark. There they captured the moon elf after a brutal fight, only to discover that she was none other than Sinnafein, leader of the Glimmerwood elves. Relations between Many-Arrows and the moon elf clan had always been strained—more so than with any of the orc kingdom's other neighbors—because of the hatred between the races, the long and war-filled history between these particular clans, and their proximity, with the moon elves roaming the Glimmerwood just across the Surbin from Dark Arrow Keep.

**Sinnafein** is the wife of Tos'un Armgo, one of the instigators of the long-ago war that brought the Kingdom of Many-Arrows into being. But while he and his trio of dark elf co-conspirators began as allies of Obould, the relationship has since fractured and frayed, and the orcs who now dwell within Many-Arrows no longer look kindly upon Tos'un and his allies.

So when Lorgru, in an effort to show himself as a grand visionary, returned the captured Sinnafein to her people, he became the subject of much criticism. Sinnafein had slain a number of orcs during her capture, and she was clearly trespassing on Many-Arrows



land. She could have been thrown in the Pit, or staked out on a high plateau for the scorpions to sting and eat her slowly, or even drawn and quartered—one of the most favored orc execution techniques.

Thus, although Lorgru is a powerfully built and strong-willed orc, his reputation for compassion has made him an easy target for his political opponents, who hold him up as an example of how peace has led the orcs of Many-Arrows astray.

**Hartusk** is among the most powerful of the Many-Arrows war chiefs. The recognized head of the traditionalist faction in Dark Arrow Keep, he does his best to convince the other orcs that they should resume their ancient customs of raiding and warfare against the other races. For an orc, the brutish Hartusk is particularly skilled at manipulation, and he has spent the past several years building up a conspiracy against Obould. Because of Hartusk's political power, Obould has had to treat him softly, but the day will soon come when one of the two rivals must take decisive action against the other.

Lorgru's action regarding Sinnafein infuriated Hartusk and his loyal followers.

**Uryuga** is the most powerful shaman in the kingdom. He firmly supports King Obould and regards Hartusk as a borderline traitor. A fixture in Obould's Citadel, Uryuga often represents the will of Gruumsh at court. He firmly believes that Obould I was a direct avatar of Gruumsh, and that Obould's policy of permanent settlement in Many-Arrows and peace with the neighboring peoples of the Silver Marches represents the direct and overtly stated will of Gruumsh.

**Gorruk Scarhide** is an up-and-coming orc shaman of Gruumsh and a public supporter of King Obould, though he is more measured in his support for Obould's policy of peace toward the other peoples of the Silver Marches. Like most shamans of Many-Arrows, Gorruk is hesitant to criticize the Obould dynasty because of the effective deification of Obould I as Obould-Who-Is-Gruumsh.

Gorruk has a bad history with the elves of the Glimmerwood, having lost many family members to elven arrows. When the whispers spread that Lorgru, son of Obould, had freed Sinnafein of the Glimmerwood—even though she could have been publicly tortured and executed—the news hit the shaman especially hard—especially, but not unexpectedly. Hartusk, whose warlike policies more naturally fit with the dark truth of Gorruk's beliefs, has recently approached Gorruk to discuss alliance.

**Morok Ulgren** is the most prominent orc blacksmith of Dark Arrow Keep, and the most important figure in the trade between Many-Arrows and the rest of the Silver Marches. Trained by dwarf blacksmiths from Sundabar, Morok is living proof of the possibility of true cooperation between the nations. Morok is a vocal supporter of King Obould XVII and his policies, and Morok's smithy provides most of the iron weapons and armor for Obould's elite guards.

## History

Dark Arrow Keep was founded in the years following the original Treaty of Garumn's Gorge, ending the war between Many-Arrows and Mithral Hall. The bitter enemies, King Bruenor Battlehammer and King Obould I, signed the treaty within Mithral Hall (making Obould and his small entourage the only living orcs ever to have entered the place) before an audience that included King Emerus Warcrown of the dwarven Citadel Felbarr, and the great Lady Alustriel of Silverymoon.

Built as Obould's capital city and strongest fortress, Dark Arrow Keep immediately became the political and economic center of the emerging kingdom, as well as a clear statement of the burgeoning power of King Obould. The keep's silhouette provided a dark and foreboding warning to any other kingdoms of Luruar whose leaders might be harboring thoughts of expelling the orcs from their newfound land.

Over the following century and more, Dark Arrow Keep has been the site of bloody conflict after bloody conflict. The orc kingdom exists in a near-constant state of uprising, and chieftains have attempted to overthrow the Obould dynasty in nearly every generation since the death of Obould I. Dark Arrow Keep has figured prominently in most of these rebellions and has been the site of many bloody battles. The Citadel in particular has repelled attacks in at least five separate uprisings.

Turbulent as its internal politics have been, Many-Arrows has remained largely true to the terms of the Treaty of Garumn's Gorge over the past century. Many-Arrows has not fought any large-scale war against any of its neighbors since the treaty was signed. It has even expanded upon this treaty in some cases, signing trade agreements with both Sundabar and Silverymoon over the past two decades.

The most serious threat to the peace between Many-Arrows and the other kingdoms of the north has been periodic raiding between the orcs and their neighbors. Rogue bands of humans, and occasionally elves and dwarves, have attacked orc merchants and villages, while orc raiders have descended from the Spine of the World to attack farms near the border of Many-Arrows. Some bands have even operated on the other side of the Surbin and through the Glimmerwood, descending from the Rauvin Mountains upon traders of Citadel Felbarr in the region known as the Cold Vale. These raiders have usually been dealt with by their own authorities; human raiders have been punished by Mithral Hall or Silverymoon, while orc raiders have been thrown into the Pit in Dark Arrow Keep.

## Politics

Since its inception, Many-Arrows has been a kingdom ruled by a single powerful dynasty, but opposition to the house of Obould has been fierce. The current ruler, King Obould XVII, is a direct descendant of

Obould I, and he leads the most powerful faction in the kingdom, dedicated to continuing peace with other nations of the region.

Obould resides in the Citadel within Dark Arrow Keep, with his harem and no fewer than seventeen of his children. His eldest son, Lorgru, is the presumptive heir to the throne. Custom prevents Obould from formally naming Lorgru as his successor, but it is clear that—barring some major upheaval—Lorgru will succeed to the throne when Obould finally dies.

Several of the kingdom's other chieftains also wield significant power within the capital. Obould's most powerful political rival is War Chief Hartusk, who is openly leading an opposition faction based on orc traditions dating back millennia before the founding of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows. Members of this fairly numerous faction argue in favor of raiding neighboring kingdoms, and many would even embrace all-out war with their neighbors. Obould and his allies have thankfully limited the influence of this faction, but traditionalist war chiefs such as Hartusk have grown powerful enough that a strong push from outside influences could easily give one of them the throne and throw the entire region into turmoil.

The shamans of Gruumsh wield political power rivaling that of the various chieftains, second only to that of King Obould. Speaking for the one-eyed god of the orcs, these shamans have traditionally sided with the Obould dynasty, since King Obould I is still widely regarded as an avatar of Gruumsh. In more recent years, however, many of the shamans, itching for sacrificial blood, have quietly shifted their allegiance. A large and growing faction among the shamans is now calling for aggression against the kingdom's neighbors.

## Relations

Uniquely among orc nations, the Kingdom of Many-Arrows is a firmly established and formally recognized kingdom of the North. Relations with its neighbors are strained, but peaceful. The orcs have signed three major treaties, and their neighbors respect the sovereignty of the orc kingdom. Even so, the orcs are well aware that most of their neighbors merely tolerate them, and that if it came to a war, virtually the entire region would unite against them.

Many-Arrows remains at peace with each of its neighbors, uneasy as relations may be. The orcs have not fought a major war in nearly a century, though periodic border skirmishes have been a nuisance. This era of peace shows all signs of continuing under the guidance of King Obould XVII and his heir, Lorgru. At present, the greatest known threats to continued peace in the Silver Marches come from Hartusk and his fellow conspirators.

The orcs' nearest neighbors are the elves of the Glimmerwood, which lies just across the Surbin River from Many-Arrows. King Obould considers the elves his kingdom's best opportunity to gain the respect of the goodly races of the region. To this end, he has aggressively pursued trading and peace treaties with the elves, though to no good effect. What little progress he makes is usually wiped out within months by the natural tendencies of the two races to fight. Between orc lumberjacks and the elves' arrogant insults, the two races can barely tolerate each other.

The dwarves of Mithral Hall are Obould's most important allies in the region, though not his most enthusiastic supporters. The Treaty of Garumn's Gorge, signed between King Obould I and King Bruenor Battlehammer, is the primary document recognizing Many-Arrows as a sovereign state. The dwarves have always been uneasy about tolerating orcs so close to their borders, but they feel more than a little responsibility for the current state of the Silver Marches. They're also fully aware that the decision was made by one of their most celebrated kings. With no comfortable way to disavow their relationship with the orcs, the dwarves of Mithral Hall have conscientiously dispatched regular trading caravans to Dark Arrow Keep, and they continue to serve as a persistent voice for peace with Many-Arrows in discussions with other regional powers.

Obould's best trading partners are Sundabar and Silverymoon. Both of those cities are far more open and diverse than the other goodly communities of the region, and both have enthusiastically embraced trade with Many-Arrows. Merchants from these two cities are the primary organizers of the Bazaar at Dark Arrow Keep. Silverymoon in particular has been a strong advocate of peace with Many-Arrows, actively blocking any movements toward war from the northernmost dwarf fortress (Citadel Adbar) or the elves of the Glimmerwood. It's certain that Silverymoon and Sundabar would both stand against Many-Arrows in an overt war, but the leaders of both cities wish to avoid war if at all possible.

The two other dwarf strongholds in the area, Citadel Adbar and Citadel Felbarr, are openly hostile to the orcs of Many-Arrows, though a few trading caravans from Citadel Felbarr roll into Dark Arrow Keep each trading season. King Emerus Warcrown of Citadel Felbarr remains keenly aware of the fact that his territory was the original location of Many-Arrows, having personally led the force that recaptured it more than a century ago from the very same Obould who signed the Treaty of Garumn's Gorge.

The residents of Citadel Adbar have always been openly hostile to the Kingdom of Many-Arrows. Adbar's merchants have consistently refused to trade with the orcs, and the former ruler, King Harbromm, made it clear that he would prefer to see orcs purged entirely from the Silver Marches. After Harbromm's death, his twin sons, Bromm and Harnoth, ascended to the throne side by side, and both have followed their father's hard line against Many-Arrows.

## The Sundering

When the greater races and gods become embroiled in some titanic event, the orcs usually become pawns in a larger game. So it is with Dark Arrow Keep and the Sundering.

The Sundering is, above all, a time of chaos, and in such a tumultuous environment, Lolth the Demon Queen of Spiders plots and tries to twist the events to her favor. On a personal level, the Spider Queen went after her most infamous exile, the rogue Drizzt Do'Urden. She engaged in a proxy war with Mielikki, using susceptible mortals of different heart than Drizzt to coax his emotional fall, to tempt his soul, and to turn him to her darkness. But Lady Lolth has lost that battle, at least for now.

On a grander scale, Lolth has set her sights on the Weave of Magic, hoping to claim the arcane as her domain.

To further both these ends, the Demon Queen of Spiders has turned her eyes to the Silver Marches and Dark Arrow Keep. The capital is already unstable, with the descendants of Obould trying to hold the course of their visionary ancestor against the primal urges of the warlike orcs, as well as the fanatical traditionalists among their ranks who long for war and lust for blood. Lolth has found in the Silver Marches, the land Drizzt long called home, a region on the edge of war—so on the edge, in fact, that the first salvoes had been exchanged before the Spider Queen urged her minions to move.

In the elven stronghold in the Glimmerwood, a pair of half-drow, half-elf siblings battled for possession of their drow father's sentient and wicked sword, Khazid'hea. The blade had come into the hands of Tos'un Armgo, a refugee from the Menzoberranzan-Mithral Hall War a century before. The pragmatic and desperate young drow had found a new home among the wood elves, and there had married Sinnafein, who would become the leader of the clan.

Khazid'hea—or perhaps it was the sword in addition to the drow heritage—corrupted the children of Tos'un and Sinnafein. In a struggle to the death, Doum'wielle killed her brother Tierflin and fled with the blade. Chased by the elves—particularly by her determined parents—Doum'wielle made her way across the borders of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows and to the cave her father had long ago used as his exit from the Underdark.

Tos'un and Sinnafein were in close pursuit of their daughter, but were themselves being pursued closely by an orc patrol. To buy some time, Tos'un sacrificed Sinnafein, hobbling her so that she could not escape. Leaving her on the doorstep of the Underdark entrance, the drow chased his daughter into the lightless tunnels.

Sinnafein fought mightily when the orcs came upon her, but hobbled as she was, she could not prevail against so many. The victorious orcs didn't kill her immediately, because as luck would have it, the leader of the orc patrol was none other than Lorgru, the son (and expected heir) of King Obould.

Lorgru saw an opportunity to further the vision shared by all the members of Obould's dynasty. In an act of mercy, he arranged for Sinnafein's return to her people, envisioning improved relations with the elves of the Glimmerwood. Indeed, Lorgru's vision might have come to pass, except that his action outraged the traditionalists of Dark Arrow Keep—particularly the vicious War Chief Hartusk—who had been plotting a most gruesome execution for the elf leader.

And so this act of mercy, kindness, and diplomacy that Lorgru hoped would bring about a more stable peace and improve his standing in his own dynasty, would provide the spark for an outbreak of war. When the dark elves returned to the Silver Marches behind Tos'un and Doum'wielle, all the necessary components to set Lolth's war in motion were already roiling before them.

### *About the Authors*

Since writing the second book in the Forgotten Realms® setting way back in 1988, **Bob Salvatore** has penned more than fifty fantasy novels, many set in the Realms, and many in worlds of his own making. He has worked in game design (both pen & paper and computer games) and just successfully completed his first Kickstarter, turning his DemonWars setting (11 novels) into a new RPG.

For the last seven years, **Bryan Salvatore** has been turning his lifelong passion for gaming into a career as a game designer, author, and software engineer. He presently works at Tricky Fast Studios, the independent game developer he co-founded with other ex-38 Studios personnel. He is also the lead game designer on *DemonWars: Reformation*, the successfully crowdfunded tabletop roleplaying game project that he's producing with his father and brother.

# Winning Races:
# Half-Orcs of the Many-Arrows Tribe

*By Shawn Merwin*

*Illustrations by William O'Connor and Tyler Jacobson*

*Ozkur Green Moss glanced nervously over his shoulder one last time before squeezing between two cracked boulders into a hidden cave. He hoped the other two half-orcs he was meeting possessed the patience to wait for him. As his eyes adjusted to the dim light of the cavern, two forms emerged from the shadows.*

*"You're late," grunted the first, a short, thick-limbed woman whose features favored the orc part of her ancestry. "We thought you got captured."*

*"Capture wouldn't stop Ozkur," chuckled the other half-orc. He wore a finely tailored set of leathers, and he could have passed for human except for the small pointed tusks peeking from between his grinning lips. "The Green Mosses are too smart to be foiled by the dimwits of Dark Arrow Keep."*

*"Let's keep this brief," suggested Ozkur. "If Obould's troops catch us meeting like this, capture will be the least of our worries." Ozkur searched the others' expressions for hints of the news they brought, but the shadows were too deep. "You bring word from your tribes?"*

*The woman nodded. "The Bloodblades agree. There is more coin and more glory in fighting for others than raiding shepherdesses and milkmaids on behalf of Many-Arrows. Our name brings fear to our enemies, and we will not waste our strength serving fools and shades. We will join the Green Moss tribe."*

*The well-dressed half-orc nodded. "We Dust-Treaders concur. The peace has served us well, and our reputation within the Silver Marches is too valuable to toss away for pointless war. Obould obviously cannot control the growing bloodlust of the orcs, and we do not want to be a part of it."*

*The momentary relief Ozkur felt dissolved into apprehension: the safety of those wishing to flee Many-Arrows hinged on careful planning and discretion—not the hallmarks of his brethren. "I estimate we have less than half a year before Obould or his favored chieftains demand that we join their raids—or worse yet, wage an all-out war against the lands of the Silver Marches. We must work quickly to prepare our people to move south, and there must be a safe welcome waiting for us when we arrive."*

*By the time Ozkur Green Moss exited the cave, the three had agreed on a defection plan. If Obould or his lackeys learned of this, the slaughter would be monumental. Ozkur knew, however, that the only hope for a bright future for the dissenting tribes rested to the south. They might face some bigotry and persecution among the other races. If they remained, they faced certain death on the end of a lance or sword.*

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

# History of Many-Arrows

The founding of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows remains a mystery to historians. They know that the orc hero Obould, after surviving many adventures and battles, retreated to the Spine of the World. How he brought the disparate and seemingly untamable orc tribes together and bent them to his will is unknown, but the results are undisputable. Before long, the orcs of the area hailed King Obould as their leader, and most followed his rule as solemnly and unflinchingly as a human knight might serve his own monarch.

More amazingly, King Obould I—and then those who ruled Many-Arrows after him—forged a brittle but lasting peace with his neighbors. While no love or long-lasting friendships resulted from the peace (especially with the dwarves who suffered greatly at the end of orcish axes), some of the tribes within the Kingdom of Many-Arrows established and maintained communication and some measure of accord with the surrounding lands.

## Restless Orcs

Despite the peace, which has now lasted for more than a century, orcs will be orcs. After the death of King Obould I, his eldest son took the throne. Immediately, tribal chieftains tested the authority of the new monarch. King Obould II put down rebellions and convinced his followers—and the rest of the North—that the monarchy of Many-Arrows could transfer and retain power.

Through the decades, however, the rule of the Oboulds has been tested time and time again. More than a few Oboulds fell to assassins' blades, and outright civil war constantly roiled just beneath the surface of the orc nation.

Later monarchs learned that the secret to ruling Many-Arrows was to lead with an iron gauntlet, but also with the softest of grips. The rulers of Many-Arrows feared that uncontrolled raids against the civilized lands of the Silver Marches risked inciting the humans, dwarves, and elves to take up arms against Many-Arrows directly. Far too many orcs are driven by the need to conquer, and denying them the ability to wage war led to internal strife. The war-loving tribes turned their innate aggression inward, against the monarchy, when they were denied the Gruumsh-given right to conquer.

The rulers of Many-Arrows grew to understand that their position was that of a pressure valve: they could control the pent-up aggression of their subjects by allowing it to leak out slowly rather than burst forth in a flurry of terrible greataxes and deluge of blood. Wars and battles against goblins, giants, and other violent humanoids of the North protected the territory held by Many-Arrows, while allowing the orcs to sate their bloodlust without risking the sanctity of the treaty with the civilized lands.

## King Obould XVII

No one understands this tricky balancing act better than the current leader of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows, King Obould XVII. The early years of his rule were some of the most peaceful Many-Arrows has known; unfortunately, the most turbulent time in the history of Many-Arrows, and of Toril in general, is in the offing.

A few months ago, a drow envoy arrived at Dark Arrow Keep, the seat of power for King Obould of Many-Arrows. In front of a hall filled with orc tribal chieftains, the drow spokeswoman made a startling pronouncement: in a matter of weeks, as shown to her in a dream provided by her dark goddess and the orc god Gruumsh, the sky would darken so as to blot out the sun and stars. This darkening would be a harbinger, the first sign of an era when the drow would rule the underworld and the orcs would rule the surface land, and together the orcs and drow would rule the world.

Knowing the duplicity of the drow, King Obould XVII was prepared to dismiss these claims without another thought. Unfortunately, one of the powerful orc shamans of Many-Arrows stepped forward and revealed that he too received similar visions from Gruumsh One-Eye. The prospect of a new war, supported by drow allies and sanctioned by Gruumsh himself, drove many orcs into a frenzy.

Obould thought he could quell the fervor of his subjects until, much to Obould's surprise, the Darkening actually occurred just as the drow claimed it would. The monarch could do nothing to stem the bloodlust felt by his followers. Many orc tribes joined the drow in what was dubbed "the War of Everlasting Darkness." Obould hedged his bets, however, pretending to support the orc tribes while holding back his own troops—even going so far as to leak vital tactical information to his supposed dwarven enemies.

The ploy worked. When adventurers foiled the plans of Lolth and brightened the skies of the North once again, Obould earned the thanks of the North's leaders for holding back his own army. More importantly, the most violent and vocal of his opposition among the orc tribal chieftains were killed in the fighting.

Unfortunately for Obould, the War of Everlasting Darkness was just a precursor to greater problems. The survivors of the tribes under his rule, rather than being cowed by their previous failure, blamed Obould for the defeat, accusing him of cowardice as evidenced by his inability to lead Many-Arrows in war. Netherese agents, looking to fill the power vacuum left with the retreat of the drow and planning an incursion against Cormyr, incited the orcs to wage more war, with promises of a joint effort.

Worst of all, whispers around Dark Arrow Keep now claim that Gruumsh himself has returned to

Faerûn in mortal form, prepared to slay the weak king and lead his followers to bloody victory. Obould cannot hold back the tides of war, and he is now reluctantly accepting the inevitable: It is time to break the treaty and take up axe and spear, as his namesake did all those years ago, against the Silver Marches.

## Half-Orcs of Many-Arrows

No group benefited more from the peace between Dark Arrow Keep and the Silver Marches than the half-orcs of the various tribes that make up the citizenry of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows.

Before the peace, half-orcs suffered even more discrimination and persecution in the orc lands than in the civilized lands. Full-blooded orcs saw the half-orcs as weaker, softer, and less capable versions of themselves—and orcs are a pitiless bunch. The half-orcs of the North found little but bullying at best, and at worst they were killed.

Occasionally a half-orc would rise to prominence or power within one of the tribes, but this was always despite their heritage, not because of it. Tribes with prominent half-orc leaders drew the attention of competing tribes, and such attention usually led to attacks.

With the advent of the Obould I's treaty with the civilized lands, circumstances changed slightly. Obould's edicts flatly denied the orcs their (perceived) self-evident and Gruumsh-granted rights to raid, pillage, enslave, and murder the weaker humanoids of the North. After brief wars against the other monstrous humanoids of the North, the strongest orc tribes could not sustain themselves on warfare alone, and they found their only recourse was to either raid other orcs or ignore the treaty. Both options led to inevitable and swift retribution from Obould's personal army.

On the other hand, those weaker tribes that had been forced to survive through noncombat means before the treaty—through pursuits like farming, hunting, mining, weapon smithing, and trade—were in a superior position to represent the newly formed Many-Arrows on the world stage. And the half-orcs within those tribes, previously deemed less worthy than their orc cousins because of their lack of physical strength, now could thrive by relying on their wits, wisdom, and superiority to full-blooded orcs in nonmartial activities.

The slightly elevated positions of some half-orcs in the tribes of Many-Arrows has not made life

easier for them. Many of the full-blooded orcs retain their sense of superiority over the half-orcs, but they now feel a resentment toward the half-breeds who have gained positions of power. Nothing is more combustible than a large helping of entitlement mixed with jealousy when those deemed inferior begin to improve their lot.

The consequences of that jealousy are felt by the half-orcs of Many-Arrows. Normally just the target of offhand orcish bullying, the half-orcs are now targeted by the orcs as symbols of everything wrong with Many-Arrows. Even in the Many-Arrows of the Obould, half-orcs are rare, and the mistrust felt toward them by the general orc population is immense. The withering glances half-orcs come to expect from people of the civilized lands are all-too-often accompanied by a tossed dagger or swung axe in the chaotic North.

Below are descriptions of three tribes of Many-Arrows that came to prominence during the time of peace. These tribes' half-orc members and leaders forged the way, making in-roads to achieve respectability within the civilized nations of the North.

### Green Moss Tribe

The Green Moss tribe's formation came about long before the Many-Arrows treaty, through a strange and improbable union. A smaller and less martial orc tribe, constantly bullied by the others, migrated north of the Spine of the World, settling in a region where no one would bother them. Arriving there, they found a newly established community of worshipers of Auril, goddess of the winter, that had been evicted from Silverymoon because of its affiliation to the cold goddess.

Neither group would have survived on their own, but they joined forces and soon found success in the inhospitable vale of snow and ice. As the tribe evolved over the years, including a few half-orc births, their focus slowly shifted from worshiping their harsh

winter mistress to worshiping the meager but diverse bounty offered by the primal tundra. Before long, the tribe flourished enough to start bringing strange flora, fauna, and minerals from their home to the markets of the southern cities.

King Obould I recognized the importance of the Green Moss tribe after he came to power, and he invited the leader of the tribe, a half-orc called Llogh Green Moss, to come to Dark Arrow Keep to act as one of his advisors. Despite the protests of the chieftains of the warrior tribes, Llogh Green Moss preached peace and tolerance, promoting trade between Many-Arrows and their former enemies.

The orcs and half-orcs who descended from the original Green Moss tribe members were some of the first Many-Arrows citizens to venture peacefully into the Silver Marches, and since then they have found tolerance in the human-controlled areas of the North. The resources they brought from the tundra became much-sought in the markets of Silverymoon, and soon it was said that if you had to navigate the dangerous passes of the Spine of the World, you could not ask for a better guide than a Green Moss. In addition, the winter druids of the Green Moss tribe learned enough primal magic to defend their flourishing homeland from threats both external and internal.

## Bloodblade Tribe

After the signing of the Many-Arrows treaty, no tribe was as incensed as the Bloodaxes. Considered some of the most fearless and brutal warriors the orcs had ever known, the Bloodaxes were always at the front lines when there were dwarves to be slain or villages to be plundered.

Having taken innumerable slaves over the years, the tribe contained a large population of half-orcs. The Bloodaxe orcs considered these smaller and weaker members of their tribe inferior warriors, and as such forced them to use swords rather than the more popular greataxes. These half-orc warriors were mockingly referred to by the orc warriors as the "Bloodblade tribe" and were left to guard the tribe's homes whenever the rest of the warriors went forth to answer the call of battle.

One fateful day, after King Obould admonished the Bloodaxes for endangering the treaty with their illegal raiding of dwarven settlements, the leader of the Bloodaxes reached his limit. The chief, Blunt Bloodaxe, decided to march on Dark Arrow Keep with his warriors at his back, planning to take the title of king for himself. Blunt's overestimation of his tribe's numbers and ability was staggering, and the entire Bloodaxe fighting force was slain by Obould's troops in a very short-lived civil war.

When the remaining members of the Bloodaxe tribe heard about the slaughter of their kin, they feared retaliation from Obould or other tribes. Despite the threat, they held their ground rather than fleeing. When Obould's personal army arrived at the tribe's home, they found a large group of Bloodaxes, led by half-orcs, prepared for battle but also ready to pledge fealty to Obould.

Obould was impressed with the bravery of the remaining warriors. He accepted their pledge and employed them as a militia, assigning them the dangerous task of patrolling the Moonwood south of Dark Arrow Keep. On these patrols, the newly named Bloodblades (taking on their mocking nickname in a symbol of pride) found and routed a clan of lycanthropes, and in the process rescued many human prisoners from terrible fates.

As word spread through the Silver Marches of a tribe of orcs, including a significant number of half-orcs, who rescued humans and showed great fighting prowess, Obould saw the diplomatic advantage in having some of his subjects fighting on behalf of the civilized nations of the Silver Marches, and he gave the Bloodblade tribe permission to become a mercenary army. After more success throughout the area, the tribe grew into a respected sword-for-hire force.

## Dust-Treader Tribe

King Obould I had many children. His full-blooded orc progeny received much respect and were integrated into his personal army or given other titles around Dark Arrow Keep. Obould sired many half-orcs as well, but these children found less favor within the ranks of Many-Arrows.

Obould was no fool, however. He knew that the new nation of Many-Arrows could not stay isolated forever, and that over time they would need a public face in the courts and markets of surrounding lands. Obould handed many of his more docile and keen-witted half-orc children over to a tribe known for their knowledge and wisdom. These half-orc children of Obould, joined by other orcs who showed skill in the more subtle arts, received instruction in history, music, magic, swordplay, and spycraft. When isolationist policies could no longer serve Many-Arrows, Obould turned to the Dust-Treader tribe for help. He sent them, including many of his children, as diplomats and minstrels, skalds and spies, all speaking of the glorious and prosperous nation that Obould had built.

In their role as the face of a nation, the Dust-Treader tribe flourishes to this day. They act as negotiators and representatives on behalf of other tribes that need to bargain with humans, elves, and dwarves. They perform as diplomats for the monarch.

Just because the Dust-Treaders represent a more civilized face of Many-Arrows does not mean they sip tea and wear silks. The tribe is just as ferocious in its attitudes as any group of orc berserkers. The Dust-Treaders are just better able to focus that ferocity into other pursuits, be it recounting the glorious past of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows in an inspirational song or pulling information out of a captured spy using intimidation and the threat of violence. Just as many victims succumbed to a Dust-Treader poisoner as to a barbarian tribe member's axe.

The Dust-Treaders proudly claim to descend directly from Obould himself, and thus they boast the blood of divinity flowing in their veins. Some of the half-orc Dust-Treaders look almost human, which allows them to move freely and mingle more comfortably with citizens of other nations—a great boon in areas such as negotiations, infiltration,and spying.

## Character Backgrounds

The following backgrounds are available for half-orc player characters. Each of these tribes has faithfully served the Kingdom of Many-Arrows throughout the era of peace with the other civilized areas of the North. Now, however, increasing raids and challenges to King Obould XVII's rule portend an end to the peaceful relations. Each tribe has much to lose if the peace is broken, and some members of the tribes may be tempted to strike out on their own, forsaking Many-Arrows as a lost cause.

### Green Moss Guide

You have spent most of your life traveling between the lands of your people, on the tundra to the north of the Spine of the World, and the lands of the Silver Marches to the south. You are as comfortable in the cold, lying on a bed of nearly frozen moss, as you are in a down-filled mattress next to a roaring fire. And your footing on the ice-covered slopes of the mountains is just as sure as on flat ground.

What has brought you away from your place within your tribe? Do you still revere the primal beauty of the cold North, or have you given up your tribal ways for something different?

**Associated Skill:** Acrobatics or Nature

### Bloodblade Soldier

The best thing that ever happened to your tribe was when your orc forefathers were slaughtered in a bloody but one-sided civil war. With them gone, the half-orcs of your tribe were freed from orc tyranny, and your people were able to prove themselves superior warriors. Even more impressive, your tribe has gained the reputation of skilled and reliable mercenaries.

Are you still a member of your mercenary tribe, searching for more opportunities to gain coin and prove your fighting prowess in the wider world, or did you decide to leave the mercenary life to take on new and different challenges? How would your tribal kin treat you if they saw you again? Did taking orders finally become too much, or are you still comfortable in a regimental unit?

**Associated Skill:** Athletics or Endurance

### Dust-Treader Skald

For years, your tribe acted as the ambassadorial force serving the Kingdom of Many-Arrows. The other races were more comfortable dealing with a half-orc rather than a full-blooded orc. In fact, the members of your tribe can sometimes pass as human. But now, as the raiding from other orc tribes worsens and war seems more and more likely, you are in a quandary.

Do you stay in service to Many-Arrows, working to maintain peace even as the treaty begins to crumble? Should you strike out on your own, acting as a translator, entertainer, or advisor to other nations as they navigate the complicated situation regarding Many-Arrows? Or have you given up on your orc cousins completely, and now just want to make your own way in the world, using your skill and wits for your own gain?

**Associated Skill:** Diplomacy or Insight

## Half-Orc Feats

Even the most human-like half-orcs occasionally feel the burning blood of Gruumsh pounding in their temples when threatened or angered. This fury allows half-orcs to perform feats beyond the capabilities of other races. Some half-orcs even learn to harness that ferocity in interesting ways.

### Inspiring Fury

The ferocity of your blows gives hopes to your allies, allowing them to catch their breath and follow your example.

**Prerequisite:** Half-orc, Skald's Aura class feature

**Benefit:** When you use your *furious assault* racial power, any creature that heals using your Skald's Aura class feature before the end of your next turn gains additional hit points equal to 1d8 + your Charisma modifier.

### Feral Companion

The link between you and your animal companion is so strong that it can feel the ferocity flowing through you as you strike.

**Prerequisite:** Half-orc, *combined attack* druid attack power

**Benefit:** You can use your *furious assault* power after you hit with your *combined attack* power's attack and your animal companion hits with the animal attack *combined attack*'s effect allows. If you do, your hit and your animal companion's hit both deal the extra damage from your *furious assault* power.

### Unyielding Rage

The bloodlust of your ancestors burns within you. When you lose your wits to its power, your fury endures.

**Prerequisite:** Half-orc, Rage Strike class feature

**Benefit:** When you use your *furious assault* power with your *rage strike* power's attack, you do not expend *furious assault*.

## Half-Orc Utility Powers

When your half-orc character gains a class utility power after 1st level, you can forgo taking a power granted by your class and, instead, gain a half-orc utility power of the same level or lower.

### Level 2 Utility Power

**Athletic Grace** Half-Orc Racial Utility 2

*Your conditioning allows you to maintain your footing.*

**Encounter**
**Minor Action** **Personal**
**Requirement:** You must be trained in Athletics.
**Effect:** During any movement you make until the end of your turn, you ignore difficult terrain. In addition, in place of any Acrobatics checks the movement requires, you can make Athletics checks with a +2 power bonus.

### Level 6 Utility Power

**Fierce Vigilance** Half-Orc Racial Utility 6

*Where others tire and let their focus waver, your stamina keeps you alert.*

**Daily**
**Free Action** **Personal**
**Trigger:** You roll initiative.
**Effect:** Add your Endurance bonus to the roll instead of your initiative modifier.

### Level 10 Utility Power

**Jolting Shout** Half-Orc Racial Utility 10

*When a friend is having trouble shaking off adverse effects, nothing is more motivating than your angry shout.*

**Encounter**
**Minor Action** **Close** burst 5
**Target:** One or two allies who can hear you in the burst
**Effect:** Each target makes a saving throw against one effect on him or her that a save can end.

### *About the Author*

**Shawn Merwin** is a technical writer and freelance game designer whose work for Wizards of the Coast includes *Dungeon Delve*™, *Assault on Nightwyrm Fortress*™, and *Halls of Undermountain*™, as well as two seasons of D&D Encounters™: *War of Everlasting Darkness*™ and *Against the Cult of Chaos*™. He has been an administrator in many Wizards of the Coast's organized-play campaigns, and his thoughts on RPGs and game design are featured in his "Know Your Roll" column at Critical-Hits.com or on Twitter at @shawnmerwin.

# The 5×5 Method

*By Dave Chalker*

*Illustrations by Jesper Ejsing and Kalman Andrasofszky*

The 5×5 method is an organizational tool for planning out an entire campaign's worth of adventures all at once. The method creates a vibrant network of linked scenarios and gives your players the ability to choose which plot threads they would like to pursue, while keeping your DM prep time to a minimum. A game planned in this way gains the feel of an open, sandbox-style campaign, while limiting the number of choices to a number that is manageable for both players and DM.

The 5×5 method creates twenty-five adventures combined into five quest paths, each of which culminates in a major event in your campaign's storyline. Assuming three to four encounters per adventure, the 5×5 campaign plan generates the seeds for 75–100 encounters—enough for characters to progress through 10 levels of play. Although the dimensions are not strictly limited to 5×5—it could just as easily be 7×6 or 8×12 or any other number combination—the 5×5 grid is easy to work with.

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

# Starting the Method

Write five distinct, long-term quests, each of which constitutes a major quest. You don't need to go into detail during this initial planning phase—just use a few lines of summary for each quest. Ideally, these quests should appeal to a variety of player and character motivations. One quest might focus heavily on dungeon-crawling, another on political maneuvering, another on recovering arcane lore, and so on. Don't worry if you can't think of five right away. You can add more later or change what you have.

For example, your five quests for a paragon-tier game might be these:

- Recover the *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords*.
- Destroy the Temple of Elemental Evil.
- Prevent the nation of Fitzleon from falling into civil war.
- Research and complete a Ritual of Cleansing.
- Defeat the Arch-Lich of Vecna.

Next, flesh out your ideas and list the steps required to complete each of them.

## Recover the Axe

Legends say that the *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords* appears when dwarves need it most. Giants are organizing an army to invade the dwarven nation of Tamhold, and a titan wielding a wondrous weapon leads the invasion force. The only way to defeat him is to find the axe (long lost to the dwarves) and place it in the hands of a dwarf leader.

## Destroy the Temple

Rumors abound of a secret stronghold to which evil creatures flock, preparing for a major event. Its location is a secret known only to the forces of darkness, but the whispers of the townsfolk may reveal some clues. What nefarious plan are the forces of evil hatching, and can the adventurers stop it in time?

## Prevent War in Fitzleon

The policies of the Empire's Inquisition are inciting riots among the citizens on a regular basis, and a nobleman seems to be spurring on the chaos for some purpose of his own. With every passing day, it seems as though the empire is falling into greater civil disarray. Much of the Fitzleon Empire's military strength is stationed along its eastern border to defend against incursions by hobgoblin warbands and their monstrous allies. If troops are stripped from the frontier to maintain internal order, the hobgoblins might seize the opportunity to raid Fitzleon.

## The Ritual of Cleansing

For centuries, a magic idol has served as the only seal for a gate to the Abyss, keeping hordes of demons at bay. Recently, these vile creatures have been slipping past its protection, and scholars believe that the idol is slowly becoming corrupted from prolonged exposure to evil. If the heroes uncover the origin of the idol, they might develop a ritual that can cleanse the statue of its taint.

## Defeat the Arch-Lich

An arch-lich who worships Vecna is performing the god's secretive deeds in the mortal world. The arch-lich has a habit of showing up to hinder the heroes' plans, and he laughs at their attempts to destroy him. Finding and destroying his phylactery is the only way to stop him before he recovers the *Hand* and *Eye of Vecna*.

# Developing the 5×5 Grid

Now that you have your five quests on paper, write down five specific steps to complete each quest path. The path should be linear so that the first step must be accomplished before the second, the second before the third, and so on. Plan to make the fifth step a fairly major accomplishment—in other words, make sure it's memorable.

Each step should constitute roughly one adventure, but you're not actually planning the scenarios yet—you're sketching out an overarching campaign. You can plan the individual adventures when you need them. For now, describe each step in a sentence or two that gets across the main idea and helps you organize the order of events in the quest.

When planning your steps, consider mixing different play styles, just as you did with the quests. At this level, you can also mix in quest steps that specifically tie into the adventurers' backgrounds. Perhaps one step involves a character's family member, or an item the adventurers need that lies hidden in a party member's home town. Not only does this technique provide an easy way to involve the characters' backstories, but it also it helps the players feel more invested in the campaign.

You may want to mix in a few quests with more relaxed structure, in which the characters can complete the first two or three steps in any order, then continue with the final two steps to complete the quest. No matter what structure you use, the first four steps should build to step 5, which is the completion of that major quest.

The five parts of our example 5×5 campaign are presented below, with each expanded to five steps.

## Recover the Axe

- Investigate dwarven legends surrounding the axe in Tarturia, the home city of the character Fargim. Encounter factions whose members don't want the axe found.
- Recover the manuscript "Olyesse's Journey," which details the last known appearance of the axe, by winning it from the Hassberg Auction House.
- Venture onto the high seas to recreate the path Olyesse took to find the resting place of the axe.
- Prove your worth on the Lost Isle of Moradin.
- Recover the *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords* and use it to battle the giants.

## Destroy the Temple

- Thwart the bandits who have been raiding villages on the outskirts of the temple.
- Find evidence of cults springing up in several towns.
- Flush out kobolds from the nearby caves.
- Put together clues suggesting that each of the three groups is somehow receiving assistance from the town of Hommlet.
- Find the Temple of Elemental Evil and destroy it.

## Prevent War in Fitzleon

- Recover the Treasure of Talon Pass for the noble Lord Istarmani.
- Discover that Lord Istarmani is involved with the evil Goddess Lolth and escape from his mansion.
- Find out that Lord Istarmani is agitating against the current government, and quell the riots he incites in his quest to win a council seat.
- Team up with the other candidates for council.
- Influence the election to ensure that the evil Lord Istarmani does not rise to a position of power.

## The Ritual of Cleansing

- Answer the call of a character's mentor who needs help defending a portal to the Abyss.
- Research the magic idol that has kept the portal sealed and discover that the key to cleansing the statue lies in the Feywild.
- Find a Fey Crossing and defeat its guardians.
- Return to the academy where Gurias the eladrin wizard (a player character) studied, and research a Ritual of Cleansing.
- Gather the elements needed for the ritual, including a demon from the Abyss. Conduct the ritual.

## Defeat the Arch-Lich

- Encounter the arch-lich as it attempts to steal the *Hand of Vecna* from the Fitzleon treasury, and thwart its effort.
- Take the *Hand of Vecna* to a safe location before the arch-lich can form itself again and come after it.
- Race the arch-lich to the location of the *Eye of Vecna*.
- Track the path of the arch-lich back to the location of its phylactery.
- Enter the Tower of Vecna and destroy the phylactery.

## Interlinking

You now have twenty-five potential adventures to work with—plenty to start a campaign. To really make it shine, you can add links among the steps across the

quests. The goal is to give players choices about which goal to pursue instead of following one quest path at a time, to give the sense of a deep campaign.

You can link entries in the 5×5 grid in multiple ways. If you link them by using a mutual or nearby location, the heroes may find that it's easiest to investigate leads related to a different adventure when they're already in town for another reason. The spatial link helps to inform the decision-making process: "We can help the town by getting rid of the kobolds, and then we can investigate Talon Pass."

A "key" linkage forces characters to move across paths instead of moving through all five steps on one path at a time by closing that path until they acquire the key that allows further progress. "The guardians of the Fey Crossing won't allow you through until you've dealt with the *Hand of Vecna*."

Note where the different paths form logical or convenient connections. This list might be a handful of notes on what each entry could cross over with, or you can create some location keywords. As with the rest of the process, these ideas are not set in stone. You'll find additional connections occurring to you naturally during sessions of play, and others will be suggested or hinted at by players.

Not every step needs a link and not every path needs to intertwine with another, but even minimal notes about how the entries could relate to each other can help immensely with campaign planning.

At this point, you have your 5×5 campaign plan. Each entry should be relatively easily to develop into three or four encounters to create a complete adventure. You've already planned out the overall strokes of the campaign, and you can develop the individual adventures as needed, depending on where the characters decide to go.

| **Recover the *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords*** | **Destroy the Temple of Elemental Evil** | **Prevent Civil War in Fitzleon** | **The Ritual of Cleansing** | **Defeat the Arch-Lich of Vecna** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Investigate the axe (Tarturia) | Thwart bandits (village near Shadonia) | Treasure of Talon Pass | Find mentor and portal (Outside Shadonia) | Stop the theft of the *Hand of Vecna* (Fitzleon) |
| Buy the manuscript (Auction House) | Find cults (in Tarturia) | Istarmani's mansion | Research idol (with Tarturian scholar) | Secure *Hand of Vecna* (leave in the Feywild, or other secure location) |
| Olyesse's journey (Isle of Moradin) | Battle kobolds (near Talon Pass) | Quell riots | Fey Crossing (island near the Isle of Moradin) | Race to the *Eye of Vecna* (pass by Town of Hommlet) |
| Prove worth | Town of Hommlet | Meet candidates | Feywild | Track the phylactery |
| Recover the axe and battle | Temple of Elemental Evil | The election | Complete the ritual (needs element from Auction House) | Enter the Tower of Vecna |

## Starting and Running a 5×5 Plan

The best time to start a 5×5 plan is at the debut of a new campaign or at the beginning of a new tier in an existing campaign. You can use the first adventure both to introduce the campaign and to introduce the five major quests that the characters can pursue. Players do not need to know the exact nature of each quest, but it's a good idea to make them aware that they have options that can add depth to their experience.

If the party has a leader (either a player character or a nonplayer character), that person might already have leads about the different quests from his or her sources. Each quest might tie into a character's backstory, but try not to entice the characters to split up and follow their own quests right away! For a more classic D&D® setup, characters may find out about the quests from postings on a job board or hear rumors.

No matter how you introduce the quest lines, lay them all out at the beginning to set the structure, and make sure that the players keep them all in mind as they adventure. Using actual quest cards is a great way to accomplish this goal.

## The First Adventure

Your first adventure should serve as an introduction to the campaign. You can use it as a way to bring the party together, and then provide the quests at the end, or the party might come across the quests as a result of events during this adventure. This introductory adventure can be a one-off scenario if you don't want to have five potential quests planned for the first session. Handling the process in this way lets you find out which quests your players are the most interested in. If you'd rather just jump in, you can try to solicit this information ahead of time by using email or when creating characters.

Our example 5×5 plan starts a new campaign in the paragon tier. We can assume that the heroes have adventured together before and that all of them are accomplished and recognized in their own right.

In the introductory adventure, the party helps to defend a temple of Pelor from an assault by undead. Afterward, a servant of the temple named Ebbek approaches the characters and tells them he has heard tales of dark maneuverings from petitioners who have come to the Church of Pelor seeking help and guidance. The clergy has prayed for assistance in dealing with these matters, and Ebbek believes that Pelor sent the party here in response to these prayers. The characters have proven capable of dealing with great threats, so the priest beseeches them for aid.

He tells the heroes what he has heard from those petitioning him:

- "Giants besiege our dwarven brethren to the east, in the nation of Tamhold. The leader of the giants wields a massive hammer that the dwarves fear is the fabled *Maul of the Titans*. Dwarven legend says that only the *Axe of the Dwarvish Lords*, in the hands of a worthy dwarf leader, can possibly put a stop to one wielding the maul."
- "Bandits, cults, and monsters are besieging villages on the borderlands between kingdoms. A little muscle should be sufficient to drive them off and protect the villages, but such muscle is in short supply in a poor town."
- "The Lord Istarmani, a generous benefactor of our church, seeks capable help in recovering an object from a faraway keep, and we promised we would seek a group with the necessary qualifications."
- "Legend holds that a magic idol keeps a portal to the underworld sealed. The scholar Mathias, whom I believe some of you already know, has investigated reports that terrible creatures are seeping through the portal. He believes he knows the cause, but he needs help, and he needs it soon."
- "A powerful undead wizard has been popping up in heavily defended fortresses and casually dispatching guards, almost at random. Those who have survived his onslaught say that he is searching for something, but they know not what."

After you have introduced the five quests, hand out a quest card for each scenario and let the players decide which they would like to pursue. You can then end the session and get to work planning the next adventure based on their choice. After each adventure, summarize the characters' progress and let the players know what might be nearby that the heroes could easily investigate. Also, take this opportunity to remind them of any time-sensitive factors. ("Remember, you're still carrying the *Hand of Vecna*!").

This system shouldn't become a straightjacket. If the actions of the adventurers or other events in the story take them in a direction that doesn't neatly fit into the 5×5, adjust as necessary. The 5×5 method is only a tool to help you plan a campaign filled with interesting choices, epic quests, and multiple climactic moments.

### USING THE 5×5 METHOD FOR MORE THAN CAMPAIGNS

You can use variations on this method for adventure planning as well. Instead of each quest consisting of five adventures, each entry is a scene. These scenes can be any activities that advance your storyline—social encounters, site investigations, traps, or full encounters. This variation on the method works especially well if you follow the "Five-Room Dungeon" model. You can still add depth to your adventure by intertwining the scenes—just keep in mind that the more linking you do, the more complex your adventure becomes. While it's relatively easy to keep track of five possible directions for the next adventure, keeping up with five options in a single session is more difficult.

You can also construct a 5x5 grid for any other facets of your DM planning, including complex NPC relationships, character backstories, interactions between various governments and factions, and so on.

*About the Author*

**Dave Chalker** is the editor-in-chief of Critical-Hits.com (where the 5×5 method—by far his most popular article—originally appeared) and a freelance game designer who has done work for the Dungeons & Dragons® and *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* games, as well as the *Cortex Plus Hacker's Guide* and the board game *Get Bit!* His most recent work for the D&D game includes "Character Themes: Sensates, Ciphers, and Xaositects" in *Dragon* 414 and "Bazaar of the Bizarre: Thingamajigs of Barrier Peaks" in *Dragon* 410.

# Unearthed Arcana:
# Snips of Scales and Dragon Tails

*By Alana Joli Abbott and Robert J. Schwalb*

*Illustrations by Beth Trott, Devon Cady-Lee, and Vincent Dutrait*

Slaying a dragon is no mean feat. When you manage the task, you have accomplished something scant few in the world can hope to achieve. As terrifying as the dragon was in life, in death it is nothing more than a carcass, much like any other slain creature. While local scavengers might appreciate the gift of free meat, being food for vultures is a waste of something that was, moments before, so majestic and terrible.

The dragon's body has uses, as many a cunning adventurer can testify. Alchemists, arcanists, and others who explore the labyrinthine pathways of magical power can always find use for dragon's horns and talons ground into powder, while artificers make extensive use of dragon scales for creating armor. But the bounty doesn't end there. A dragon's corpse can provide many rewards for adventurers who don't mind the bloody work of dissecting and harvesting rare material from the remains.

Although this article offers ideas for treasures beyond a dragon's hoard, not all the information here is suitable for every campaign. Plundering corpses for the choicest bits can skew treasure rewards beyond those expected from a dragon encounter, to say nothing of opening the door to the notion of harvesting all sorts of other monsters which, if not the equal of dragons, are sufficiently magical to make their remains valuable. Easy acquisition of such material, especially when high-level adventurers start butchering lower-level monsters for their parts, can turn an ordinary D&D® campaign into something macabre and probably unbalanced. Use the information described here wisely. Limit the prize of flesh and bone to those powerful dragons that have a significant presence in your campaign setting, both to boost the reward for slaying the monster and to make encountering the monster more meaningful.

**Quest Goal:** The easiest way to introduce this material into your campaign is to introduce the concept as a quest goal. When the heir to the throne falls ill, the sage declares that the cure recipe requires a dragon's eye. A rare dragon bone flute could be the necessary tool to banish an infestation of snakes from a kingdom. Perhaps a king believes the only way to fight the undead horde at his doorstep is through raising his own army from a dragon's teeth.

**Black Market:** Hunting intelligent creatures and trading on their remains may be illegal in many countries—perhaps to protect good dragons and other benevolent creatures from being hunted to extinction, or perhaps because of an old treaty between a kingdom and a dragon that demanded respect and honor for dragonkind. Despite laws put into place to protect

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

dragons, dragon parts are highly valued by a select market of alchemists, healers, and enchanters who are unlikely to willingly share their knowledge with the general marketplace. Such practitioners might hire adventurers to do the nasty work of collecting material. To cover their activity, they could proclaim that a dragon living nearby is a menace that steals livestock and terrorizes the people of the area. Or they might be honest and just come right out and say what they need and what the adventurers must bring back, since they're not likely to be trained dragon killers themselves. Working with such employers could turn the heroes into poachers and set them up against a number of legal challenges along with the dragon battle itself.

Alternatively, these potential employers could be the villains of the tale. If the trade in remains of intelligent creatures is illegal, perhaps the king's guard hires the characters to break the black market and track down the people who sell the parts and the poachers who procure them. Since dragons are intelligent creatures, they might be the ones who reach out to adventurers in an effort to keep their friends and family, or themselves, safe from hunters.

**Monstrous Scavengers:** Consuming dragon flesh does not normally have an affect on the eater, aside from a bit of heartburn, though it does not stretch the imagination to envision what might happen if a dragon's remains were somehow contaminated—infused with magic that could transform, physically or mentally, anything that happened to eat the flesh and anything that happened to eat the eater. When a cursed dragon falls in battle and drops from the sky to land somewhere in the remote wilderness, strange monsters might spill from the region and cause trouble for settlements in their path. Officials would quickly look for outside help to contain the monstrosities spawned through contact with the corpse (which can be created using the draconic creature template from *Draconomicon™: Chromatic Dragons*). In such an adventure, the characters must battle their way through horrors to find a partly devoured carcass. As part of their reward for dealing with the threat, the characters could wrench free some useful bit of meat or bone from the dragon's remains, made special by the curse afflicting it.

# Dragon Scales

Of all the treasures wrested from a dragon's remains, its scales are the most common. Armorers and artificers value dragon scales for their toughness, their durability, and their resistance to the elemental energy the dragon used in life, all of which can be coaxed forth when infused with magical power. Even without magical energy, armor made from dragon scales is vastly superior to scale armor made from mundane material.

The trick to harvesting dragon scales is being certain the dragon is of a proper size and age to make the attempt practical. A wyrmling dragon's scales have not yet aged to their full hardness, and because of the creature's smaller size, too few of the scales are large enough for crafting armor or shields. Though a wyrmling dragon is a much less dangerous opponent than its older brethren, adventurers would need to hunt and kill several to acquire enough raw material for a fine suit of armor.

Living dragons shed their scales as a normal part of their grooming process. These scales, while not abundant, litter their nests and are often mixed in with the dragon's hoard. Very old and older dragons who have lived in the same lair for centuries might have shed enough scales to create a suit of dragonscale from them.

## Dragonscale Armor

A suit of dragonscale armor is always magical, always has a snug fit, and encases the wearer in a second skin of rippling scales cunningly affixed to a hide base. A suit also includes a helmet, typically festooned with horn harvested from the dragon that donated its scales.

The following suits of armor supplement the *dragonscale armor* options presented in *Adventurer's Vault™*.

**Dragonscale Armor, Brown** Level 17+ Rare

*The armor's brown scales smell of baked sand.*

Lvl 17 +4 65,000 gp Lvl 27 +6 1,625,000 gp
Lvl 22 +5 325,000 gp

**Armor:** Scale
**Enhancement Bonus:** AC

**Properties**

✦ You gain resist 10 fire.
*Level 22:* Resist 15 fire.
*Level 27:* Resist 20 fire.
✦ You can burrow through sand at a burrow speed equal to your speed.
✦ You gain earthwalk.

**Attack Power** (Polymorph) ✦ **Daily** (Move Action)

*Requirement:* You must be bloodied.
*Effect:* You transform into a cloud of sand, and you can shift up to your speed and enter enemies' spaces during the move. Each time you enter a creature's space for the first time during the move, the creature is blinded (save ends) and takes damage equal to twice this armor's enhancement bonus. You return to your normal form at the end of the move.

**Dragonscale Armor, Gray** Level 19+ Rare

*The armor's dull gray scales carry a faint acerbic smell.*

Lvl 19 +4 105,000 gp Lvl 29 +6 2,625,000 gp
Lvl 24 +5 525,000 gp
**Armor:** Scale
**Enhancement Bonus:** AC

**Properties**

✦ You gain resist 10 acid.
*Level 24:* Resist 15 acid.
*Level 29:* Resist 20 acid.
✦ You are immune to petrification.

☼ **Utility Power** (Aura, Fear) ✦ **Daily** (Minor Action)
*Effect:* You activate an aura 3 that lasts until the end of the encounter, until you deactivate it as a minor action, or until the armor is removed. Enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to saving throws.

✧ **Attack Power** (Acid) ✦ **Daily** (Free Action)
*Trigger:* An enemy is hit by your melee attack.
*Effect:* Close burst 1 centered on the triggering enemy (enemies in the burst); 1d8 + your Constitution modifier acid damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
*Level 24:* 2d8 + Constitution modifier.
*Level 29:* 3d8 + Constitution modifier.

**Dragonscale Armor, Purple** Level 19+ Rare

*This armor's deep purple scales can cause viewers to feel mild anxiety or mental discomfort.*

Lvl 19 +4 105,000 gp Lvl 29 +6 2,625,000 gp
Lvl 24 +5 525,000 gp
**Armor:** Scale
**Enhancement Bonus:** AC

**Property**

You gain resist 10 psychic.
*Level 24:* Resist 15 psychic.
*Level 29:* Resist 20 psychic.

✧ **Attack Power** (Charm) ✦ **Daily** (Standard Action)
*Attack:* Ranged 10 (one dazed or stunned creature); the armor's level + 3 vs. Will
*Hit:* The target is dominated until the end of your next turn.
*Miss:* You regain the use of this power.

✧ **Attack Power** (Psychic) ✦ **Daily** (Free Action)
*Trigger:* An enemy is hit by your melee attack.
*Effect:* Close burst 1 centered on the triggering enemy (enemies in the burst); the target is dazed and takes ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends both).
*Level 24:* Ongoing 10 psychic damage.
*Level 29:* Ongoing 15 psychic damage

# Dragon Hide

Although many artificers prize dragon scales, a dragon's hide also has great value. The hide typically retains the dragon's innate resistances and responds well to magic that calls forth the dragon's essence, bestowing that essence onto any creature that wears the hide.

## Adamantine Hide Gloves

Adamantine dragons lack the compassion found in many metallic dragons, tending to be domineering, haughty, and arrogant. Although many people regard adamantine dragons as protectors and allies, these dragons have been known to overreach and make enemies of mortals who should be their allies.

Gloves assembled from the hide of an adamantine dragon provide unequaled protection from hazardous material the wearer handles.

**Adamantine Hide Gloves** Level 10 Rare

*These supple leather gloves fit tightly over the hands, becoming almost a second skin.*

**Hands Slot** 5,000 gp

**Property**

You gain resist 1 to all damage.

**Utility Power** (Thunder) ✦ **Daily** (Free Action)
*Trigger:* You use an action point.
*Effect:* Your melee attacks deal 5 extra thunder damage until the end of the encounter.

# Dragon Teeth

All dragons venerate the dragon gods, with metallic dragons usually worshiping Bahamut and chromatic dragons following Tiamat. Although these gods favor all their children, some dragons rise in the gods' esteem and find a place more directly in their service as guardians of sites important to the god.

Dragon teeth are mythic relics from a bygone age or the teeth from a dragon that protected a site sacred

to a dragon god. Such teeth are highly sought for their power to create skeletal warriors. When used, the tooth sinks into the ground and six skeletal warriors spring into existence nearby.

**Dragon Tooth** Level 15 Rare

*This blackened fang of exceptional size vibrates with power.*

**Consumable** 1,500 gp

**Utility Power ✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* Area burst 2 within 10. Six dragon tooth warriors appear in unoccupied spaces in the area. If you succeed on a DC 25 Arcana check, the dragon tooth warriors become allies to you and your allies, and you decide how they act and move on each of their turns. On a failure, the dragon tooth warriors become enemies to all creatures present in the encounter, and although each warrior is most likely to attack the creature nearest it, the DM controls the warriors.

**Dragon Tooth Warrior** **Level 15 Minion Soldier**

Medium immortal animate (undead) XP 300

**HP** 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +14

**AC** 31, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26 **Perception** +11

**Speed** 7 Darkvision

**Immune** disease, poison

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw ✦ At-Will**

*Attack:* Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC

*Hit:* 10 damage, or if the warrior scores a critical hit, 20 damage.

Triggered Actions

**Final Wrath ✦ Encounter**

*Trigger:* The warrior drops below 1 hit point.

Effect *(Free Action):* The warrior moves up to its speed and uses *claw* twice.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Str** 23 (+13) | **Dex** 20 (+12) | **Wis** 19 (+11) |
| **Con** 17 (+10) | **Int** 10 (+7) | **Cha** 10 (+7) |

**Alignment** unaligned **Languages** Supernal

# Dragon Blood

Mythology ascribes many mystical qualities to dragon blood. Some tales claim that one can become invulnerable by bathing in dragon blood, while others say sipping the blood grants the gift of tongues. Certain legends hold dragon blood to be deadly poisonous, while others claim it to be a panacea. The truth is that the blood's quality varies with the dragon.

## Green Dragon Blood

The blood of some green dragons can be incredibly toxic, so that a mere taste of the ichor can kill.

**Green Dragon Blood** Level 15 Rare

*This acrid blood retains its liquidity long after the dragon's death and mixes with any substance to which it is added.*

**Poison** 1,500 gp

**Attack Power** (Poison) **✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You apply the poison to a melee weapon or one piece of ammunition. During this encounter, the next creature hit by a weapon attack using the poisoned item takes ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

*First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is also dazed and weakened (save ends both).

*Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target falls unconscious for 1 hour.

**Attack Power** (Poison) **✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You pour the blood into a drink or onto a plate of food. Within the next hour, the first creature to consume the poisoned food or drink takes 10d10 poison damage and is dazed and weakened until the end of its next extended rest.

## Iron Dragon Blood

Some iron dragons transmit their natural durability and might through their blood. Creatures that wash their bodies in the blood of an iron dragon become difficult to injure for a time.

**Iron Dragon Blood** Level 15 Rare

*Washing your skin with this gritty fluid leaves behind a rust-red stain but makes you nearly invulnerable for a time.*

**Consumable** 1,500 gp

**Utility Power ✦ Consumable** (Standard Action)

*Effect:* You apply the blood to your body and lose a healing surge. If you do, until the end of the encounter, you have resist 5 to all damage. In addition, whenever you start your turn taking ongoing damage that a save can end, you can make a saving throw against the ongoing damage.

## Silver Dragon Blood

A silver dragon's blood confers the gift of tongues to anyone who drinks it. Some silver dragons may be persuaded to part with a measure of blood if convinced the need is great.

**Silver Dragon Blood** Level 15 Rare

*You drink this icy blood, and you feel a tingling in your mouth, throat, and mind.*

**Consumable** 1,500 gp

**Utility Power ✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You drink the blood and lose a healing surge. If you do, until the end of your next short rest or extended rest, you can roll twice for any Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate check you make, using either result. In addition, when you speak, anyone who can hear you and understands a language can comprehend what you say.

# Dragon Powder

Dragon parts, powdered and reconstituted, are believed to have potent healing properties. Even in cultures where dragons are revered rather than feared, powdered blood, bone, horn, and internal organs have been used to create medicinals.

**Dragon Powder** Level 15 Uncommon

*Consuming this powder restores health and vigor.*

**Consumable** 1,000 gp

**Utility Power** (Healing) ✦ **Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You consume the powder and lose a healing surge. If you do, any disease or poison affecting you ends, and you regain 3d6 + 15 hit points.

# Dragon Bones

Dragon bones are reputed to have many wondrous magical properties. Hence, artificers often incorporate them into the magic items they create, grind them down to powder to create potions and elixirs, and incorporate the powder and shavings into all kinds of alchemical items. Sometimes, simply wearing a sliver of dragon bone can confer incredible good fortune or allow a wielder to channel the dragon's power.

**Gold Dragon Bone Ring** Level 21 Rare

*Gold veins spiderweb this otherwise simple bone band, which always feels warm.*

**Ring Slot** 225,000 gp

**Properties**

✦ You gain a +2 item bonus to saving throws.

✦ You gain resist 15 fire.

**Attack Power** (Fire, Zone) ✦ **Daily** (Standard Action)

*Attack:* Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +24 vs. Reflex

*Hit:* 1d10 + 10 fire damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

*Milestone:* If you have reached a milestone, the burst creates a zone of fire that lasts until the end of your next turn. Each creature that ends its turn in the zone takes 15 fire damage.

*Sustain Minor:* The zone persists until the end of your next turn.

**White Dragon Bone Wand** Level 15+ Rare

*This white wand is obviously crafted from bone, but it lacks the brittleness of bone and feels cold to the touch.*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lvl 15 | +3 | 25,000 gp | Lvl 25 | +5 | 625,000 gp |
| Lvl 20 | +4 | 125,000 gp | Lvl 30 | +6 | 3,125,000 gp |

**Implement:** Wand

**Enhancement Bonus:** Attack rolls and damage rolls

**Critical:** +1d8 cold damage per plus

**Property**

While wielding the item, you are immune to cold damage.

**Attack Power ✦ Daily** (Free Action)

*Trigger:* You hit a target with an at-will or encounter attack power that has the cold keyword using this wand.

*Effect:* The attack's cold damage against the target is maximized.

**Attack Power ✦ Encounter** (Free Action)

*Trigger:* You hit a target with an at-will or encounter attack power that has the cold keyword using this wand.

*Effect:* The target gains vulnerable 10 cold until the end of your next turn.

## *About the Authors*

**Alana Joli Abbott** has written several adventure scenarios for RPGA® campaigns, including *Living Kingdoms of Kalamar*, *Xen'drik Expeditions*, and *Living* Forgotten Realms®, as well as fiction, comics, and history articles. When not rewriting Greek or Norse mythology in her home games, she blogs about writing and mythology on her home page at www.VirgilandBeatrice.com.

**Robert J. Schwalb** has contributed design to or developed nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire* RPG, *Star Wars* RPG, and the d20 system. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Book of Vile Darkness*™ and *Player's Option: Heroes of the Elemental Chaos*™. He's also a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. For more information about the author, check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com or follow him on Twitter (@rjschwalb).

# Bazaar of the Bizarre:
# Dine on the Wild Side

*By Peter Schaefer*

*Illustration by Matias Tapia*

Eladrin of the Feywild dine on moonberry meat pies and seared kettlefish, accompanied by *sonata wine*. Drow serve toadstool steak tainted with *myconid essence* to their prisoners to keep them alive but weak, while they feast on lobe of grell to strengthen their magical powers and sip *shadewater* to preserve their secrets from their enemies. The efreet consume a spirit from the Burning Bronze Distillery to stoke their furnaces, and they use the same drink to poison their marid cousins.

There are too many exotic dishes and drinks to count. In all the distant and mystical places that exist throughout the realms, someone has found a way to make what's available edible and credible to the palate. Most of these, to a foreigner, will taste strange, disgusting, indescribable, or heavenly. But some dishes, through unusual characteristics of the soil or the method of preparation, acquire special properties.

To an adventurer, these magical drinks and dishes represent an occasional boon—the sort of thing a canny hero can use to advantage. Or perhaps tasting such an exotic treat is an adventure in itself, thus making it a worthy goal for the gastronomically ambitious.

## Blood Apricots

In the orchards of Baator, where devils cultivate fallen starfruit and fruits of agony, stand the groves of *blood apricots*. They arise in the natural world on the sites of mass atrocities where much blood has spilled. Those trees are often transplanted to Baator; devils with culinary inclinations pay great sums for a viable blood apricot sapling. The blood apricot tree grows a fruit resembling a deep orange-red apricot, with a taste that is similar but richer and somewhat flavored of iron. The fruit generates this blood as part of its growth, and it has minor healing properties. If watered with copious amounts of blood, the fruits turn a much darker red and their taste turns bloodier; to grow this delight, devils water their orchards with the blood of tortured souls.

**Blood Apricot** Level 5 Uncommon

*A rich orange-red, this small fruit turns much darker if given a taste of blood.*

**Consumable** 50 gp

**Utility Power ✦ Daily** (Standard Action)

*Effect:* You lose a healing surge, bleeding onto the apricot, which absorbs your blood and the healing surge.

**Utility Power** (Healing) **✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You eat the apricot. Unless the apricot has absorbed a healing surge in the past 12 hours, you lose a healing surge, and when you do, you regain only 2d8 hit points. If the apricot has absorbed a healing surge in the past 12 hours, you can instead spend a healing surge and regain an additional 2d8 hit points.

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

## Burning Bronze Rye

The efreet masters of the Burning Bronze Distillery, originally in the City of Brass but now with satellite distilleries across the Elemental Chaos, take great pains to conceal their source for the rye that they use to make their famous *Burning Bronze Rye*. Competing distilleries have sent spies across the plane searching for the flame-grown grass from which the famous drink must be distilled. In truth, all the rye is sourced from a single farm in the material world, run by generations of farmers who raise a good crop and are successful, despite the fact that no one nearby knows where they sell their produce.

The combination of excellent—if mundane—rye and a magical distilling process infuses the final spirit with heat and depth of flavor. Aficionados the worlds over recognize it as a fine drink, and many wealthy nobles keep it on the back of the top shelf until they need to impress a guest. *Burning Bronze Rye* warms the soul, invigorates the spirit, and inspires greatness. Or so it states on the label.

*Burning Bronze Rye* comes in bottles aged 15 years, aged 50 years, and aged 500 years.

**Burning Bronze Rye** Level 8+ Uncommon

*The smell of this spirit is enough to water your eyes and chase away any cold feelings in your extremities.*

Lvl 8 125 gp Lvl 28 85,000 gp
Lvl 18 3,400 gp
**Consumable**
**Utility Power** (Healing) ✦ **Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You drink the rye. Until the end of the encounter, you gain resist 5 fire and a +2 power bonus to damage rolls for powers that have the fire keyword. If you spend an action point before the end of the encounter, you regain 5 hit points.

*Level 18:* Resist 10 fire, +4 power bonus, and 10 hit points.

*Level 28:* Resist 15 fire, +6 power bonus, and 15 hit points.

## Foulbranch Seed

Of the many curious flora in the Feywild, none is quite so repulsive as the foulbranch. This tree grows wide and crooked, and its bark exudes an acidic slime with an acerbic smell that is foul to the nose and outright deadly to many lesser forms of plant life. In this way, it clears space for its own species to propagate. When the foulbranch drops a seed, its outer pod dissolves into a puddle of disgusting goo that clears the ground around the seed and chases away predators. Creatures with any sense of taste at all find it impossible to consume a *foulbranch seed* and they instead vomit immediately upon tasting its repugnant flavor.

**Foulbranch Seed** Level 8 Uncommon

*Wrapped in a sealed packet, this seed feels as if it's about the length of your thumb.*

**Consumable** 125 gp
**Utility Power ✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* If you are inside a creature that has swallowed you, and you release the seed, the creature immediately disgorges you and is dazed until the start of its next turn. If you swallow the seed, you immediately vomit, ending or preventing the effect of any ingested substance you consumed by swallowing within the last minute, and you are dazed until the start of your next turn.

## Ghost Ale

*Ghost ale* is brewed from barley and hops harvested under the new moon—called the "no moon" by some—and treated with a secret formulation that might include a touch of formaldehyde. This dark brew has a spiritual impact on those who drink it. Those who imbibe too much of it report having out of body experiences. Few breweries in the material world produce *ghost ale*, but the drink is more common in the Shadowfell, where it is easier to make and its effects are less pronounced. In some regions of the Shadowfell, *ghost ale* is the local small beer, and it is consumed at every meal.

**Ghost Ale** Level 12 Uncommon

*This dark ale smells of musty soil, but it has a hint of something rich and inviting.*

**Consumable** 500 gp
**Utility Power ✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You drink the ale. Until the end of the encounter, you ignore difficult terrain and can move through spaces occupied by enemies.

*Special:* If you drink three *ghost ales* within a span of 5 minutes, you become unconscious for 1 hour. During that time, your spirit leaves your body. It is invisible, has phasing, and ignores damage that isn't radiant or force, but it can't attack. When the hour ends, or when your spirit takes any damage, your spirit returns instantly to your body and you wake up. If your spirit took any damage, you take that damage when you wake up.

## Myconid Essence

*Myconid essence* is drawn from the spongy cores of dead myconid sovereigns. Or, among the cruel drow, it is harvested painfully from living myconids kept imprisoned for this purpose. *Myconid essence* is an oily substance with an earthy tang. A phial about the size of a human child's finger contains a single dose.

This extract saps the strength from those who consume it. Some drow families use it to dose all the food they give to their prisoners or to selected slaves who are too valuable to kill but too dangerous to be allowed full use of their faculties.

Certain drow alchemists and mages are searching for ways to make the essence easier to deliver to an unsuspecting victim. Adventurers in the Underdark should beware; they might end up on the receiving end of such a research effort.

**Myconid Essence** Level 12 Uncommon

*This earthy-smelling oil pours slowly, and only strong food can cover its taste.*

**Consumable** 500 gp

**Utility Power** (Poison) ✦ **Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You pour the essence into a drink or onto a plate of food. Within the next hour, the first creature to consume the food or drink takes a –4 penalty to Strength-based ability checks, Strength-based skill checks, and Strength-based damage rolls for 24 hours.

## Sonata Wine

A cultivar of grape in the vineyards of eladrin nobility tastes of potential. Vintners throughout the Feywild considered it a mediocre grape until Hebaru Tonaro discovered the grape's secret quality: It loves song. If the vine is cared for with melodious song throughout its life, it develops into a unique fruit from which expert winemakers of the eladrin nobility can make an exceptional wine.

The amount of work that goes into singing a grape to greatness makes bottles of *sonata wine* rare. What's more, the quality of song dictates the quality of the resulting grape, and the finest singers prefer to perform for crowds of appreciative people rather than for silent, impassive fruit. Still, many singers have earned small fortunes by dedicating themselves to the vine for a season.

Some vintners prefer to use mortal vocalists rather than eladrin for their grapes. They enchant the greatest voices from the mortal world and take them away for a year and a day that they will not remember, until the day when a properly aged bottle appears as thanks.

**Sonata Wine** Level 12 Uncommon

*You cannot describe the scent or taste of this wine, which fills your head with beautiful music.*

**Consumable** 500 gp

**Utility Power ✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You drink the wine. For 1 hour, you have a beautiful singing voice and you gain a +5 power bonus to Diplomacy checks to influence others with song.

## Shadewater

Water burbles up from a spring into an underground lake, flows down subterranean streams, and never sees the surface. When that water pools in the corpse of an intelligent creature who drowned in that stream and left behind a lost spirit, the water becomes *shadewater*. Light has never touched it, and the only life it knows is cold, eternal despair.

Naturally formed *shadewater* is rare; attempts to create it intentionally have yielded few successes. When a creature does find a source, it never lasts long: such conflict arises over possessing a source of *shadewater* that, inevitably, blood spills in the lake and spoils the discovery for everyone.

A drink of *shadewater* chills the spirit and makes the drinker cold in action and emotion. It serves as a protection against feelings, allowing calculated and considered decisions, and it also distances the mind from those who would affect the imbiber.

**Shadewater** Level 16 Uncommon

*Whatever cold substance is in this stoppered stone flask, just touching it makes you a little sad.*

**Consumable** 2,500 gp

**Utility Power ✦ Consumable** (Minor Action)

*Effect:* You drink the *shadewater*. For 1 hour, you gain resist 10 psychic, a +5 power bonus to Insight checks against Bluff checks, and a +2 power bonus to your Will defense.

### *About the Author*

**Peter Schaefer** fights seventeen men before he has breakfast in the morning. That's easy, because he has help from his wife, who's way tougher than they are. Besides, after fighting them each morning for so many years, the seventeen men basically roll over for him now. Who wants to get beaten up every day? But I guess it's a living. Just as Peter's living tangentially involves designing games and writing fantastic game-related material, such as this article.

# Villainous Variety

*By Steve Winter*

*Illustrations by Steve Ellis, Eric L. Williams, and Spikytiger*

Villains: Every story needs one. The heroes of a Dungeons & Dragons® campaign are likely to face dozens of villains before the campaign runs its course.

Coming up with that many memorable villains can challenge any DM's imagination. To help with that, we offer this extensive list of villainous attributes and characteristics.

The purpose of these lists is not to roll out a ready-to-play villain, although they could be used that way. They can steer your creativity onto pathways that you wouldn't take otherwise. We all fall into creative patterns. Allowing chance to play a role in the creative process helps to break those patterns and produces ideas that we'd never turn out purely on our own.

Treatises on "how to write your novel" typically include a chapter on the villain, and that chapter typically advises the writer to make that villain believable. Give the protagonist a human side. No one sets out to be evil; even the worst villains think of themselves as the good guys of their own stories.

What's true in literature, however, doesn't always hold in D&D®, as we'll see. Mythology and fantasy games trade heavily in metaphors, archetypes, and absolutes. Why that's the case doesn't concern us here. What's important is that in a fantasy setting with magic and gods and literal monsters, the role of villain comes with vastly broader possibilities than in most other types of stories.

Our D&D villains come in three basic flavors. The first two are universal; the third is typically found only in fantasy tales. At some point, you need to decide which type of villain you're dealing with. That might happen at the beginning of the design process, in the middle, or at the end. Whatever works best in your head is the right way for you to decide.

**1. Conflicting Goals.** This villain is not necessarily evil, but his or her goals or views conflict with those of the heroes or with the aims of society at large. We consider Copernicus, for example, to be a hero for showing us the truth that Earth is not the center of the universe. But in his time and place, when the Church was assailed by Reformationists and the world was crowded with people spouting crackpot cosmological theories, it's easy to see how those who fervently believed in Ptolemy's astronomy would see Copernicus's ideas as a dire assault on faith and reason. Alternatively, this villain might be someone who could be a hero in the right time and place, but put him or her in a different situation and virtues become vices. Oliver Cromwell's faith and resolve drove his army to victory after victory during the English Civil War, but just a few years later those same qualities produced atrocities in Ireland that are cursed to this day.

**2. The Hunger.** This villain type is more evil and less redeemable than the first, but still recognizably one of us. His or her villainy arises from a deep physical or psychological need that can't be fulfilled. At some point, these characters swore to sate that hunger no matter what the cost, and their feet were set irrevocably on the path to evil. Clearly something is wrong with these villains; they make choices that no normal person would make. But by understanding where the villain came from, one can understand his or her choices, even while those choices remain horrific and inexcusable. Vampires in the mold of Louis

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

de Pointe du Lac are an obvious example; the wight seeking to restore its lost soul or the resurrected mummy of Imhotep murdering innocents to revive its eons-dead lover are further cases in point.

**3. Pure, Concentrated Evil.** This mode isn't unique to fantasy, but it plays better in the swords & sorcery genre than anywhere else. In most fantasy settings, absolute evil is real. Evil is not just an ethical notion; it has arms and legs, eyes and ears, and it walks and eats and gets wet in the rain much like anyone else. In a setting like that, some villains willingly choose the path of evil because they're just twisted. They were born bad: naturally sick, sadistic, man-eating, evil-worshiping nightmares. Maybe they're human, maybe they're bestial, maybe they're something much worse. Unlike other villains, DMs need feel no pressure to humanize these monsters or to fuel the players' empathy toward them. The goal is not to make such villains believable but to make them larger than life. Melodrama plays well in fantasy and even moreso in roleplaying games, and few villains do melodrama as well as those brewed from pure, concentrated evil. Players can hate this villain without guilt. Seeing the world through his or her eyes would be a disturbing experience, not an empathetic one. Most D&D adventures end with the characters killing the villain; everyone can feel good about striking the lethal blow against one of these fiends. Darth Vader (before anything was known about his life as Anakin Skywalker), Thulsa Doom, and Voldemort are prime examples of this villain.

What follows are seven numbered lists to consult when you need a villain who breaks your typical mold. When consulting the lists, you can roll a result randomly or choose something that catches your eye. Just don't choose the same things over and over.

## Origin

These five origins are the same ones used in monster stat blocks. If you select one randomly, you can roll a d6, d8, d10, or d12, depending on how heavily you want to skew the result toward the mortal world.

| d6+ | Origin |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Astral Sea** (immortal) |
| 2 | **Elemental Chaos** (elemental) |
| 3 | **Far Realm** (aberrant) |
| 4 | **Feywild** (fey) |
| 5+ | **Mortal World** (natural) |

## Type

All D&D heroes will eventually face their fill of goblin warlords, gnoll champions, lich kings, and beholder tyrants. But villains can arise from any intelligent species, from species whose intelligence is so alien that we can't be sure about it, and any unintelligent species that can mutate or be altered by magic. That allows just about anything.

| d20 | Type |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Angel.** Even angelic creatures go bad, usually with all the best intentions. |
| 2 | **Animate.** A nonliving thing that is brought to life is animated. Evil Pinocchio fits in this category. |
| 3 | **Aquatic.** This category covers a huge range, from intelligent whales, fish, and sharks down through arthropods (lobsters) and cephalopods (octopoi) all the way to super-intelligent sponges and sea cucumbers. Throw in fantastic creatures like sahuagin, kuo-toa, aboleths, and chuuls, and you have the makings of a truly alien and bizarre villain. |
| 4 | **Beast.** Most beasts have animal Intelligence, but IQ can be boosted, Dr. Moreau-style, or the creature might be so cunning that it seems more intelligent than it is. |
| 5 | **Construct.** Unlike an animate, a construct is not a living being. It might appear to be alive, or it might appear completely mundane until it moves and speaks. Imbued with free will, such an entity could have unique animosity toward living creatures, with or without innate intelligence. |
| 6 | **Demon.** Chaotic evil, tireless, and devoted to spreading their special brand of misery. |
| 7 | **Devil.** Lawful evil. An oldie but goodie. |
| 8 | **Dragon.** There's no shortage of types to choose from, but consider trying something different. Don't rule out metallics gone bad or a gang of delinquent juveniles. |
| 9 | **Elemental.** Roll a d4 to randomly select a specific element, or choose a chaotic mix of all four. Elementals seldom rise above average intelligence, but what they lack in genius they make up for in commitment to entropy. |
| 10 | **Giant.** Giants make frequent appearances as thugs and bullies, but they seldom get the starring role. Giants who want something more than to steal a few cattle or to roast a few shipwrecked sailors have great potential as villains. |
| 11 | **Homunculus.** A homunculus is a particular type of animate creature. Most are just intelligent enough to carry out the tasks for which they were created, but that could be quite intelligent if the creature was designed to be the lab assistant to a wizard—who then perished in a mysterious lab accident. |
| 12 | **Humanoid.** Anything with two arms, two legs, a torso, and a head is included here, if it's not covered by another entry. |
| 13 | **Magical beast.** Some magical beasts have an outlandish appearance, but others could easily hide in plain sight, manipulating mundane beasts, others of their kind, or even people. No one would suspect the livestock until it was too late. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 14 | **Ooze, pudding, slime.** At first glance, the deck appears to be stacked against such creatures ever taking a lead role, but how do we know that their tiny Intelligence scores don't conceal thought processes so alien we can't comprehend them? Consider such a creature grown to enormous size and loose in a city's sewers: able to seep through any opening, to attack through any grate or drain, to survive on whatever food washes down from above. Give it telepathy and the ability to mimic other creatures and you'd have a truly frightening and memorable villain. |
| 15 | **Plant.** D&D already offers a few intelligent plants, but there are also mutant plants, plants from space, and plants that mimic or replicate people. We unscientifically include fungi in the category, so don't forget about myconids and massive organisms with roots that stretch for miles, or across entire continents, absorbing nutrients from the soil—or from other sources. |
| 16 | **Reptile.** From lizardfolk and yuan-ti to hydras and kruthiks, reptiles of every shape crawl, clamber, and slither through many people's nightmares. The notion of a race of serpent-people who ruled the world as supreme sorcerers and scientists before humans existed—who might even have played a role in shaping the evolution of humanity as slaves—is nearly as old as fantasy fiction. |
| 17 | **Shapechanger.** No one can be trusted when shapechangers are on the loose. A shapechanger will always appear as someone else: a sage, the Keeper of Dragons, the king. It can go anywhere unchallenged, infiltrate any organization, replace loved ones or even player characters in pursuit of its goals. |
| 18 | **Spider.** What better creature to spin a symbolic web of evil than one that also spins actual webs of silk? You can't beat that metaphor. This motif lends itself to endless variation, from mindless swarms to drow-controlling monstrosities to tower-dwelling, eight-limbed masters of sorcery. |
| 19 | **Swarm.** All sorts of creatures swarm: spiders, snakes, rats, birds, insects, undead, and the immature forms of things with disturbing life cycles. As they grow in number, they can become both more dangerous and more intelligent. We tend to think of Tiny creatures swarming, but what if Medium, Large, or even Huge creatures formed your swarm? |
| 20 | **Undead.** In fantasy, undeath can afflict almost anything that once lived. Some creatures choose undeath, and others have it forced on them. Some pass into undeath very soon after dying, and others might lie in their graves for centuries before rising again. An undead creature might loathe its current form or not even recognize its own passing. Someone who died during the height of an ancient empire and lay dead through centuries of downfall and social collapse—perhaps even triggered that collapse during their lifetime—would arise into a very puzzling world. |

## Career

Aside from alien creatures such as aberrations and elementals, most villains probably had a calling of some type before they turned their energy to full-time villainy. Many of them may still occupy that role, but with darker, secret aspirations.

| d20 | Career |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Ambassador or diplomat.** Wealthy, charismatic, influential, and foreign—those are the traits common to diplomats and ambassadors. They might manage a nest of spies and saboteurs, or they might seek to weaken their host territory from within. An ambassador need not come from the country next door or even down the coast, but might represent a kingdom from the Underdark, from beneath the sea, or from an altogether different plane of existence. |
| 2 | **Bandit, outlaw, or pirate.** To be an outlaw in a savage time means literally that your actions have placed you beyond the law's protection. Anyone can kill you without repercussion. If a reward has been posted, someone almost certainly is hunting you. In other words, you have nothing left to lose; your situation can't get any more dire, so you have no reason not to cause as much harm as you can. |
| 3 | **Bounty hunter.** Where there are outlaws, there will be bounty hunters chasing them. Their tactics and their ethics won't be much better than the outlaws'. |
| 4 | **Civic leader.** Mayors, governors, judges, and other local leaders have local power. After they get a taste, who's to say they won't want more? |
| 5 | **Courtier, courtesan, government minister.** Royal courts are filled with ambitious, unscrupulous types. Gaining power and royal favor are obvious motivations for their villainy, but revenge, sabotage, blackmail, espionage, lust, greed—every vice is on display in the halls of power. |
| 6 | **Criminal.** Most criminals have straightforward goals; they want to shift money from other people's stacks to their own, using methods that the law doesn't allow. This villain could be a criminal mastermind or a straightforward gangster. The common thread is that they lead an organization, whether that's a traditional thieves' guild, a gang of street urchin pickpockets, a flotilla of river pirates, or a cabal of blackmailers. |

7 **Demigod.** Beings of great power seem compelled to meddle in mortal affairs. They grant boons to their favorites, hinder their adversaries, stir up passions, and inject their whims into destiny. Even good gods and demigods do harmful, uncaring acts—not because they're evil, but because their concerns are bigger than the welfare of individual mortals. Notions that mortals define as good and evil might have little meaning to a being that can shape worlds and to whom death is an abstraction.

8 **Former adventurer.** Some of the most dangerous opponents a group of adventurers can ever meet are others of their own kind. A career spent fighting and slaying deadly foes conditions a person to see opponents as obstacles rather than as people and to view killing as just another tool in the box of potential solutions.

9 **Merchant.** They aren't all greedy, underhanded, and dishonest, but enough of them are to give that stereotype some heft. A villainous merchant could be in league with criminals or spies. A shop or caravan makes an excellent cover for all sorts of underhanded activity, from receiving stolen goods and smuggling to coordinating rebellions to distributing magical trinkets that drain life energy from the masses.

10 **Military commander.** Generals, admirals, and other high-ranking officers have not only great authority but also great autonomy. Few people question their orders, and officers don't waste time justifying their commands to subordinates. If a commander decides to turn rogue or to serve a new, secret master, it may be a long time before anyone traces the threat to its source. When the danger is revealed, heroes might face an entire army, because soldiers typically feel more loyalty toward their generals than to distant kings and emperors.

11 **Noble or aristocrat.** Niccolo Machiavelli wrote, "It is much more secure to be feared than to be loved." The first concern of most rulers is to secure their position and safety, because only then can they rule effectively. Since fear provides the surest path to security, only a foolish ruler relies solely on the velvet glove without the iron fist. In other words, a perfectly good monarch going about the business of ruling properly will be considered a villain by at least some citizens. Should player characters get on a ruler's bad side, there's no limit to the "evil" that can be inflicted on them. And, of course, there's always the possibility that a beloved king, queen, or emperor hides dark secrets just waiting to be unmasked.

12 **Rebel or peasant leader.** Most D&D characters come from humble origins, so they have a natural tendency to side with the little guy where social injustice is involved. But not every folk hero is Joan of Arc or Robin Hood, even if that's the picture they present to their followers. Villains understand that downtrodden commoners can be manipulated into all sorts of rash and risky schemes.

13 **Religious figure.** In a world where deities make their presence known in tangible ways, those who speak for the gods wield great power. Even spiritual leaders are subject to worldly corruption and worse, such as being tricked into serving supernatural entities that masquerade as deities but seek only humanity's destruction or enslavement.

14 **Sage.** This category covers any sort of learned specialist, including alchemists, artificers, astrologers, astronomers, arcane mathematicians, historians, physicians, engineers, and masons. Rare, specialized knowledge can be nearly as potent as magic in a primitive world. Those who possess it always want more, even when they lack the wisdom to use what they already know safely or sanely—assuming they fully comprehend the vast secrets contained in their minds. Mortals' hunger for knowledge is a lever that can be used by dark entities to pry open the gates between worlds.

15 **Sheriff, warden, bailiff, or constable.** Just as not every bandit is Robin Hood, not every sheriff is the infamous Sheriff of Nottingham. But some are, and some are worse.

16 **Slaver.** We recoil naturally from any character who traffics in slaves. No matter how noble or likable the character might be personally, he is tarnished utterly by his profession. Not even necromancy carries as heavy a stain. There's no reason to hold back or mitigate this character's evil. If ever you wanted a villain who could be portrayed as morally bankrupt and rotten to the core, this is it.

17 **Spy.** The first difficulty when battling a spy is figuring out that you're battling a spy. Secrecy is everything to this villain. Being found out means failure and probably death. Since a spy is already leading a double life, there's no reason to keep just one secret. This villain's life will be a complex engine of lies, deceits, masks, and concoctions.

| | |
|---|---|
| 18 | **Thief or assassin.** Unlike the criminal, who commands an organization, the thief or assassin largely works alone or in a small team of specialists, regardless of whether they're working solely for themselves or carrying out someone else's orders. Along with being masters of stealth and infiltration, they are also unsurpassed at evasion and escape, so cornering such a villain is an enormous challenge. If you want a villain who always escapes to bedevil the characters over and over, a thief or assassin is a prime candidate. |
| 19 | **Warlord.** One man's blood-drenched warlord is another's tribal champion. Fight the temptation to dismiss every warlord or regional strongman as a thug and a bully. Whether barbarian or civilized, human or monster, only those with a special mix of insight, cunning, and brutality can rise to dominance in violent times. |
| 20 | **Wizard.** Any villain who works primarily through magic falls into this category, whether the character is a wizard, sorcerer, warlock, necromancer, enchanter, witch, or other type of spellcaster. Aside from the usual sorts of human flaws, entities who delve into magic may be more susceptible than most to megalomania, paranoia, psychosis, and other forms of insanity—or, perhaps, to an excess of sanity and to experiencing aspects of reality too clearly for their own good. |

## Goal

Every villain wants something. Ruling the world, destroying the world, opening the world to demonic infestation, and casting the world into a dark age of suffering and despair have been done before. A different and memorable villain needs a different and memorable goal.

| d20 | Goal |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Alter time.** This villain is unhappy with the present time and wants to either run the cosmic clock backward to an earlier age or fast-forward to a distant future that's more to his or her liking. Perhaps this villain actually came from that other time, or glimpsed it through a ritual of time-scrying. In all likelihood, this villain is the only person who will benefit from the switch. |
| 2 | **Cause catastrophe.** Earthquakes, floods, blizzards, tsunamis, meteor storms—come up with a reason why that catastrophe would benefit someone and you have the beginning of a plot. An artificer might need all the star-metal she can get for her creations, so she seeks ways to trigger horrendous meteor showers. Earthquakes could uncover long-buried ruins of great interest to chaotic scholars. |
| 3 | **Conceal something wonderful from humanity.** There's always been plenty of suffering to satisfy those who relish humanity's pain. If some great event or discovery threatened to actually bring about world peace and end misery, plenty of creatures would take an interest in preventing it from happening. |
| 4 | **Convert others to a cause or bring enlightenment.** Dedicating yourself to a cause creates a sense of purpose and belonging. People like joining organizations and taking membership pledges, especially when membership promises benefits that aren't available to nonmembers. It doesn't matter if those benefits materialize for only a few members, as long as they do so prominently. And remember: the first rule of Strangler's Club is, no talking about Strangler's Club! |
| 5 | **Desecrate or destroy.** As soon as someone has something nice, someone else wants to wreck it. That's such an immutable law of nature that everyone has seen this plot dozens of times. To keep it fresh, the target needs to be surprising. It might be so big that no one believes it can be destroyed (a mountain, a canyon) or so small that it seems beneath notice (a roadside shrine, a tapestry). It might be a blighted location that most people would like to see gone anyway (the ghoul-infested ruins overlooking the river), leading heroes to wonder why the villain wants it destroyed and forcing them to protect it until they figure out what's going on. Or it might be something intangible that can hardly be destroyed in the first place (the wonder of children, the guidance of the stars) but would be dearly missed if it were gone. |
| 6 | **Die in glory.** Most villains would be happy to gain eternal life. Not many seek their own deaths. When they do, they plan to make a show of it. Like barbaric kings of fallen ages, they also tend to take a host of unwilling subjects along with them. |
| 7 | **Distill people into a more useful form.** Human beings contain many useful components, from bones and blood to pneuma and free will. Such things could be valuable to workers of dark magic, but people harvesters might also have more mundane, if equally grim, purposes. Perhaps human teeth are used as currency in their homeland, or they know the secret of converting a person's dying breath into wish fulfillment. |
| 8 | **Eat or consume.** Man-eating monsters are nothing new and are not even especially fantastical, but they are always horrifying. The closer they are to human themselves, the more horrifying they become. People are only the beginning, however, where villainous food is concerned. Nonhuman creatures might require anything as sustenance, from the familiar (brains, fear) to the grotesque (skin, tongues) to the bizarre (hope, memories). |

9 **Enslave others.** Enslavement can be physical, psychological, or magical. Unlike converts to a cause, a slave is always unwilling, even when magically compelled to appear otherwise.

10 **Erase a cosmic boundary.** By cosmic boundary, we don't mean anything so pedestrian as the boundary between the Feywild and the mortal world. This villain wants to meld Law into Chaos, or Good into Evil, in a way that makes the distinction pointless. Such a change would undermine a fundamental tenet of existence and have repercussions that are impossible to fathom.

11 **Find and destroy the Chosen One.** In all likelihood, the existence of a Chosen One is a secret. Even the Chosen One might be unaware of his or her specialness. Destroying the Chosen One can take many forms, from simple murder to elaborate sacrifice, and it can mean anything from killing the Chosen One to consuming the unlucky person's body or essence.

12 **Fulfill a prophecy.** Prophecies can be good or bad, but they are almost always vague and not subject to engineering. This villain is interfering with the natural course of events to ensure that a prophecy's conditions are fulfilled at an unnatural time or in an unnatural way.

13 **Gain power.** This category covers an enormous range of villainous activity. Power can be political, military, economic, spiritual, magical, even temporal. It always comes at someone else's expense. Villains who gain power can never resist using it—usually before they've learned to control it.

14 **Hide from enemies.** If a villain simply wants to drop from sight and not be found, that probably doesn't pose much threat to the world or to the characters. On the other hand, if the villain is using the mortal world as a hiding place against powerful creatures from another plane, that's a different situation. Players might decide that the enemy of their enemy is their friend, but the villain's enemies could be every bit as bad or even worse than the villain is.

15 **Reshape continents.** This villain wants to reshape the world into something more to his liking. The reasons why probably are fascinating but don't matter here. The process will begin with limited tests, but the effect of shifting coastlines, submerging cities, pouring mountain ranges into the ocean, and leveling forests is guaranteed to be devastating even when it's conducted on a small, test scale. This is also a useful villain to introduce when you'd like to correct a feature of your campaign map that bothers you.

16 **Return home, or bring home here.** Like the villain from entry 14 who came to the mortal world from somewhere else, this villain is a visitor to the characters' realm. This creature wants to make the mortal world more like its bizarre alien home or transport a portion of the world to its home plane.

17 **Revenge.** The reason why the villain wants revenge can be interesting and pivotal to the tale, but motivation alone is not enough to set the villain above the pack. To make this adventure memorable, the method or conditions of revenge must stand out. A worthwhile villain will only seek an elaborate, devastating revenge, such as trampling an entire city beneath the iron wheels of a monumental iron chariot drawn by a gargantuan primordial hydra or turning everyone who attends a feast into a salt golem.

18 **Spread blight, chaos, death, or evil.** To a certain extent, this goal goes without saying. It becomes unusual when the villain adopts a surprising method: transforming all birds to stirges in an outward-spreading wave, or quietly infecting only children with lycanthropy.

19 **Supplant its own leader.** Power struggles within evil organizations are nothing new, but there's some truth to the adage, "better the devil you know." Nothing demands that the villain's organization is overtly evil; the villain might be trying to seize control of a respected organization and subvert it to an evil purpose, possibly without even recognizing the great harm this scheme will lead to.

20 **Uncover secret knowledge.** What secret is more alluring than one "man was not meant to know?" These villains are easy to hide in plain sight; everyone respects collectors of knowledge. They're likely to hire adventurers to help in their search for lost records, so player characters can easily be drawn into their service. By the time characters have a full picture of what's going on, it may be too late to stop the villain from triggering the final act—using material the heroes provided.

## Henchmen

Few villains operate alone. Even the iconically solitary Dracula needed Renfield. Besides acting as the villain's eyes, ears, hands, and shield, henchmen help to define the villain. The types of creatures a villain surrounds itself with are an important clue to its character.

| d20 | Henchmen |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Champion.** Whatever other sorts of servants this villain has, all of its important instructions are carried out by one highly capable creature. This champion might be more ferocious than the villain itself, but it serves the master for some reason. It might be well paid, owe a debt of honor, be magically compelled, or have no free will. Look for a Solo creature to fill this role, but also give it additional henchmen of its own. |
| 2 | **Demons or devils.** The most important factor when working with demons or devils is that they never do anything out of generosity, like-mindedness, or from the goodness of their hearts. If they are helping the villain, they are getting something in return. Classically, it's something the villain has a complex scheme to avoid turning over when the time comes. Trust is always in low supply where these creatures are involved. |
| 3 | **Draconic creatures**. Dragons, dragonborn, draconians, kobolds, drakes, wyverns: all make powerful servitors, once bent to the villain's will or bought off with something they value. Dragons and their kin are proud, however, which makes them loathe to serve any creature less powerful than themselves. Their loyalty can be unshakable when serving their own kind, but it is always in question otherwise. |
| 4 | **Elementals.** Considering their power, elemental creatures are relatively easy to summon and control. Considering their chaotic nature, control is all-important. Only a villain who is supremely confident about maintaining control should attempt long-term plans involving elementals. |
| 5 | **Far Realm creatures**. Monsters from the Far Realm are always risky to work with. Their motivations are inscrutable, and simply being in their presence can be dangerous. That same alienness is what makes them fearsome to enemies. Villains who were a bit unbalanced to begin with might be drawn to henchmen from the Far Realm. If they weren't slightly insane before, they probably will be after dealing with aberrations for any length of time. |
| 6 | **Fey creatures.** The Feywild is filled with denizens who will work for villains in the mortal world, both to feed simple greed and for the malevolent thrill of terrorizing mortals. Their magic and magiclike abilities make them tough opponents. |
| 7 | **Foreign mercenaries.** The key word here is foreign. This villain's henchmen come from beyond the frontier or from a distant land whose inhabitants have a reputation for savagery and cruelty. If they've suffered militarily at the hands of the villain's home territory, they have all the more reason to enjoy their work. |
| 8 | **Giants.** A villain with subtle plans probably should avoid using giants as henchmen, but they're unexcelled at smashing architecture and destroying armies of Medium foes. Just a handful of giants can do the work of hundreds of lesser warriors. |
| 9 | **Homunculi.** For a villain with specialized needs and the skill to create homunculi, these creatures might be the ideal answer. They can be custom-designed to the perfect size, shape, ability, and intellect for their jobs. Homunculi could even be crafted to produce more homunculi, turning out a production line of clonelike warriors. |
| 10 | **Mechanical constructs or golems.** Of all the possible types of henchmen, constructs and golems are among the most reliable. Their up-front cost is substantial compared to hiring mercenaries (who can be paid from pillage) or summoning elementals, but constructs are ideal for paranoid villains or for those who need jobs done that are suicidal or beyond the life span of mortal creatures. |
| 11 | **Members of a lost civilization**. People who have been isolated from the world for centuries are easily manipulated by clever villains. They probably have a strong cultural memory of a time when things were better—when they were on top—and a few promises that they will rise again might be all it takes to swing them into the villain's service. |
| 12 | **More of its own kind.** Orc warriors serving an orc warlord or spawn of Kyuss serving a herald of Kyuss are not surprising or memorable. Beholders serving a beholder or liches serving another lich testify to immense power on the leader's part, or some other force holding that contentious cabal together. |
| 13 | **Psychic slaves or thralls.** The loyalty question can be addressed by employing only creatures that are psychically enslaved or enthralled by the villain. Mind slaves also put player characters into the position of fighting and possibly killing innocent foes who can't help themselves. |
| 14 | **Soldiers.** The difference between soldiers and foreign mercenaries is that soldiers are locals, or are at least related to the local culture. When soldiers are used as henchmen, it implies one of three things. They are unaware of the villain's true aims, or the villain's stated aims seem desirable to many people, or a reasonable person could conclude that working for the villain is better than being victimized by the villain. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 15 | **Sorcerous cabal or witches.** The villain need not be a practitioner of magic to employ a cabal of sorcerers as minions, but it doesn't hurt. Rituals probably play a large role in such an organization, including a few tailored specifically for the villain's plans. |
| 16 | **Summoned beings.** The advantage to summoning your henchmen is that there will be plenty more where those came from. As long as the villain can keep summoning, the henchmen won't run out. They might or might not serve willingly once they're called. |
| 17 | **Swarms of rodents, snakes, and other vermin.** A villain who's mastered the secret of controlling swarms of vermin has a high creepiness factor, as well as plenty of replacements for high battle casualties. |
| 18 | **Undead horde.** Much like vermin, there's no danger of running out of dead people. Social taboos against violating the dead make it clear that this villain has no respect for society's norms. |
| 19 | **Uplifted beasts.** Depending on the setting, uplifting beasts to be nearly the equals of humans (or even superior to them) might be considered a marvel of science or a blasphemy against god and nature—or both. A common theme running through many fantasy settings is that the good guys specialize in beneficial magic while the bad guys delve into evil, forbidden science. Beasts could be uplifted solely through magic, too, but they're inherently less interesting that way. The model here is the scientist with a god complex experimenting with knowledge that humans can't handle. This can also be reversed: the henchmen aren't animals upgraded into humans but humans surgically debased to the level of animals. |
| 20 | **Worshipers or cultists.** Fanatical followers imply a villain with towering charisma. They can be terrifying in their single-mindedness. Like thralls, they create a moral quandary for heroes who face the prospect of carving a path of blood through beings who might be perfectly harmless without this villain manipulating them. Because cultists are drawn from the general population, they can blend into it for covert missions such as keeping watch on enemies of the cult (like the characters) or launching terror attacks in the marketplace. |

## Quirks

Villains become memorable for their eccentricities as much as for their plans and their henchmen. Narcissism and egotism afflict villains more than they do the average person, but those are far from the only standout characteristics.

| d30 | Quirk |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Addict.** The villain is physically or psychologically addicted to something: a drug, an alchemical or magical concoction, gladiator contests, gambling. This addiction is readily apparent in any interaction with the villain. |
| 2 | **Agent of another entity.** This villain works for someone else. That relationship might be mutually beneficial or it might be entirely one-sided, with this villain merely a pawn or a thrall of an even more powerful entity. It's also possible that this villain is up to no good without the boss's knowledge or approval. |
| 3 | **Blind.** A blind villain will have alternative senses to compensate. This quirk can be extended to cover altered senses of any kind, whether the alteration is a diminishment or a boost. |

4 **Bronze.** Not necessarily bronze, and not necessarily literally, but why not? Villains who meddle with alchemy, magic, and magically enhanced science can suffer all sorts of compositional backlash. Or maybe the alteration was intentional.

5 **Burned, scarred, disfigured, or tattooed.** Probably the result of an accident, but possibly intentional. The villain might take pains to hide the scarring or might draw attention to it.

6 **Cannibal.** The villain's cannibalism could be a secret that is revealed for shock effect at a key moment, or it might be a well-known characteristic that adds an element of horror to the adventure. "Cannibal" doesn't need to mean "eats humans." Anything that eats others of its own kind is a cannibal, whether human, illithid, or dragon.

7 **Changeling.** This villain was abducted while still a child and raised by creatures who were not its family or even its species. As a result, it mixes the physical characteristics of its biological parents with the (probably worse) cultural characteristics of its adopted parents. A changeling might be revered as powerful and unique in its new home, or it could have been treated little better than a slave, leaving it bitter at the entire world.

8 **Child.** Few villains are more chilling than one who combines deep evil with a child's lack of wisdom and restraint. A child need not be literally young. It could also be someone who grew older in body but not in mind, or who somehow regressed from adulthood back to childhood.

9 **Collector.** A dedicated collector must complete the collection despite the cost to himself or to others. Collecting might be a sideline from the creature's main line of villainy, but the collection indicates an obsessive, detail-oriented personality.

10 **Cowardly.** Facing danger is what henchmen are for. Before launching any dastardly plan, a cowardly villain figures out how to save its own skin in the event that things fall apart—or better yet, to ensure that it never meets foes face to face.

11 **Diseased.** The disease might arise from villainy, or villainy might arise from the disease. Certain types of parasitic infestations could be included here, as well, for an extra dose of ickiness.

12 **Disembodied or ghostly.** But not undead. A disembodied villain has figured out how to separate consciousness from the body, probably in an attempt to become invulnerable or immortal. This poses obvious problems for anyone tasked with killing it.

13 **Exiled.** This villain was banished from its homeland or home dimension and came to the adventurers' home seeking refuge or fresh victims. It may have complex feelings about the land of its origin, or it might simply hate its home with an all-consuming passion and want bloody revenge on those who drove it out.

14 **Hybrid.** This villain combines the worst or most shocking features of two or more different kinds of creatures. Demonic hybrids are the most common. The wider the disparity between the types, the more shocking the mix will be.

15 **Larval form.** Everything is more disturbing when it's larval, especially if it's a creature that doesn't normally have a larval form. A larval human or elf, for example, would be shocking. How this creature came to be and what it will metamorphose into are top questions for the villain's foes.

16 **Legendary.** The villain was once a legendary adventurer like the heroes, or like the heroes hope to become. She enjoyed a sterling reputation, then something went very wrong.

17 **Loves kittens.** Or puppies, or something else that contradicts cold-blooded villainy.

18 **Master of disguise.** This villain can pass among normal folk without drawing attention, and frequently does so. The heroes might have interacted with this character many times in the past without realizing it. In fact, there's no telling whether the face they associate with the villain is his or her true face at all.

19 **Multiple personalities.** The villain seems to change from encounter to encounter, or even within a single encounter, because it is host to multiple personalities. Most of them will at least be villainous, but not necessarily all. Most will share the villain's goals and have their own takes on how to pursue them, but some might be clueless about what's going on. Different personalities might even have completely different power descriptions and stat blocks associated with them. Alternatively, the villain might be possessed, but sometimes the character's own personality re-exerts control briefly.

20 **Mutant.** Either through accident or deliberate effort, the villain has mutated into something other than what it started life as. This is similar to being a hybrid but with an emphasis on more subtle alterations. Psychic powers are a favorite type of mutation, with extra limbs running a close second.

21 **Oversized or undersized.** The villain is one or two size categories bigger or smaller than a typical member of its species. Regardless of which way the change went, the villain probably considers it an advantage, at the same time that it's a source of shame and ridicule.

22 **Parent.** Not just anyone's parent but a parent of one of the player characters.

23 **Photophobic (afraid of light).** Meetings with this villain will always occur in dim light. Photophobia is a wonderful metaphor for villains who fear their activities being exposed "to the light of day."

| | |
|---|---|
| 24 | **Plant or fungus.** It might look like a person, but it's actually a super-intelligent plant. Or maybe it does look like a plant. In either case, it has serious issues against animals, especially people. |
| 25 | **Reckless.** Some villains defy the stereotype of being obsessed with planning. Some leap before they look, are driven by their tempers, or are adrenaline junkies. Such villains might be more easily lured into traps, but their unpredictability means that they'll surprise the heroes more often than the other way round. |
| 26 | **Resurrected.** This villain lived, died, and now lives again. It might have been brought back by followers or cultists, through its own cunning devices, or through the intervention of someone or something that hoped to make use of it (but probably met a bad end in the process). Learning about the villain's past might provide a key to cutting short its future. |
| 27 | **Scopophobic (afraid of being seen).** A scopophobic villain always wears a concealing mask and cloak at the very least. It might hide behind a screen or speak through someone else's body, like a spirit channeling through a medium. |
| 28 | **Someone from the characters' past.** The characters trusted and possibly even worked for this person in a previous adventure. Did something change in the meantime, or were the characters used as unwitting pawns of evil? |
| 29 | **Statue or inanimate object.** Not entirely inanimate, obviously, because it must be able to plan and carry out villainous schemes. But to casual observation, this villain appears to be a harmless object. It may be nothing more than a vessel for an alien intelligence, or perhaps generations of worship spawned a dark intellect into existence in the lifeless stone or wood. |
| 30 | **Time traveler.** A visitor from the past might bring knowledge of magic and rituals long since forgotten in the present day; one from the future could come armed with technology that surpasses anything imagined, combined with historical knowledge of events to come. |

## Weaknesses

The final element in designing a villain is giving him or her a weakness. It doesn't need to be a direct physical vulnerability, such as taking double damage from blessed weapons, although that's a possibility. A weakness can also be a barrier the villain can't cross, a distraction that will pull it away from completing a ritual or from killing someone, or a way to remind it of its lost humanity. The villain probably can be defeated without exploiting its weakness, but the risk to the player characters will be higher. The final confrontation will be more dramatic and more memorable if characters come armed with the one weapon that gives them the edge over a terrifying foe.

| d20 | Weakness |
|---|---|
| 1 | **A gap in its armor.** The villain is nearly invulnerable inside its armor, but one weakness exists. That might be a poorly forged joint that only the armor smith knows about, an exposed spot on its belly, or the edge of its foot that wasn't properly dipped into the magical bath when it was an infant. |
| 2 | **Blessed weapons.** Magic weapons are one thing, but weapons that carry the blessing of a god are something else. Such blessings aren't easy to come by and don't last forever. |
| 3 | **Blind spot.** The villain could be killed if someone could get close, but no one can get close—unless they approach through the creature's blind spot. Does anyone know where it is? |
| 4 | **Cats.** It doesn't need to be a cat. Different religions and cultures fear and revere different animals and objects. Finding the correct trigger is key, as is not overusing it lest the villain overcome fear through repeated exposure. |
| 5 | **Crystal.** Diamonds, rubies, even common quartz might be the villain's kryptonite. Figuring out how to turn small, fragile gems into weapons can be an important element in the adventure. |
| 6 | **Disease.** Enemies who come from foreign lands, other times, and distant dimensions might have peculiar vulnerabilities to common diseases. Alternatively, a magical disease might be the "cure." In any case, diseases seldom operate fast enough to drop a victim in the space of a single encounter. Characters need to figure out how to infect the villain and then keep him from acquiring a cure. The disease might even make the villain stronger and more ferocious before it lays him low. |
| 7 | **Family member.** Someone from the villain's family could hold the key to her downfall. This is especially appropriate in cases of generational curses or massive personality shifts, where being confronted by a daughter or brother can trigger a flood of emotion or provide a distraction that allows someone to strike a killing blow. |
| 8 | **Item from the past.** Something from the villain's past, or from the distant past when similar villains were a routine problem, could be an obvious but difficult-to-obtain solution. This relic might even have defeated this villain before, in which case it probably was hidden somewhere, waiting for the day when the villain reappeared. |
| 9 | **Its own reflection.** Any villain with this weakness will be aware of it and will take steps to avoid seeing its own reflection. The weakness might manifest as an actual attack against itself or as a wave of self-loathing that leaves the villain temporarily vulnerable. |

10 **Limited use of a magic item.** Villains whose power comes from a magic item must be careful not to exhaust it prematurely. Most villains are smart enough to handle that calculation, but they might not have factored in adventurers who intentionally trigger the item's use (probably against themselves, at great risk) to hasten its end. Once that crucial item is used up, the villain can be fought on an equal footing.

11 **Love.** Anyone can say "I love you," but to really mean it is something special. To really mean it when you're addressing a mass murderer or a possessed monster is even more amazing, unless that monster was once a loving husband, wife, father, or mother, before evil stepped in and took over.

12 **Magic item, if taken away.** Similar to the magic item that can be used up, this one must be wrested away from the villain, who isn't going to make that easy. If losing an item means the villain's downfall, then ensuring it never falls into enemy hands will be the first task the villain devotes her genius to. It can be done, but it will be difficult and dangerous.

13 **Phobia.** People who become villains are exposed to a lot of psychological trauma on the road to villainy. It stands to reason that they could develop phobias along the way. Sunlight, dust, clocks, insects, the color orange: literally anything can be the object of irrational fear. The more irrational it is, the better.

14 **Ritual magic.** A villain probably has normal vulnerability to normal magic, or might have special protection against it, but ritual magic could be another matter. Few rituals have any obvious offensive use, so finding clever ways to use them against a tough foe is an interesting challenge.

15 **Silver, wood, or other weapons.** Such weapons will be less effective and more fragile than those the characters are accustomed to using, but if those are the only materials that will harm the foe, then heroes deal with the difficulty and press on.

16 **Sound.** The villain's weakness might be sound in general, or it could be a particular type of sound, such as music, song, the crying of a baby, or its own voice from before it devoted itself to darkness.

17 **Sunlight.** A classic. The trick will be luring the villain into a position where sunlight can be used against it, because no one who can be killed or rendered vulnerable by sunlight will build a lair where sunlight can penetrate.

18 **Unreasoning hatred.** A villain who has an unreasoning hatred for a particular character or thing might momentarily neglect a more important task or drop its impenetrable guard if given the opportunity to attack its nemesis. This might not work out well for the nemesis, but it's all about the greater good.

19 **Water.** Both Dracula and the Wicked Witch of the West were adversely affected by water, but in very different ways. Dracula's weakness is the more interesting of the two: he could cross running water only at high or low tide, or by being carried across. The vampire hunters counted on that weakness when laying their ambush for Dracula at the port of Varna, but the Count was too wily to fall into their clutches that way.

20 **Wolfsbane or another rare plant.** Plants make wonderful weaknesses, because they can be out of season, restricted to distant climes, fragile and easily spoiled, or difficult and time-consuming to prepare. The way they're used can be clumsy and inefficient, or their effectiveness can vary with the time of year, phase of the moon, hours or days since the plant was harvested, and the specific variety of plant used.

### *About the Author*

**Steve Winter** has been involved in publishing D&D one way or another since 1981. When this article was written, he was a web producer for the *Dragon* and *Dungeon* online magazines. By the time you read this, he'll be on to something else.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

# Alsimur Droon

## Arranger of Shortages

*By Ed Greenwood*

*Illustration by Kieran Yanner*

Bards of Faerûn seem most interested in heroes, princesses, adventurers, and those who most fervently serve or thwart the gods. Yet the true men and women of action encountered most frequently, even daily, in the most places across the Realms are merchants.

### Out of Nowhere

True merchants of action aren't the hardworking but stay-at-home shopkeepers, nor are they the farmers who venture to local markets to sell their produce. Rather, they are traders who travel the land to make their deals and the entrepreneurs who brave danger to get needed or demanded goods, whose competitors aren't well-known rivals in the next town over.

Mostly, these active traders are peddlers whose grumbling pack mules and groaning wagons make up caravans. These stalwarts are not nearly as numerous as the stay-at-homes, yet they form a "respectable many in number"when counted up.[1]

Among these jostling many, a few individuals stand out. One currently prominent traveling merchant, well known (not to say notorious) but with a reputation still on the rise, who came seemingly out of nowhere,[2] is the unscrupulous but strikingly successful Alsimur Droon.

### The Smiling Half-Orc

As the years pass, Urmlaspyr has increasingly become the most lawless, easygoing, tolerant, and cosmopolitan port in Sembia. It is less encumbered by noble houses (and the dark rulers who lurk behind them[3]) than neighboring Saerloon and Selgaunt, and it is geographically more convenient for covert trade with Westgate and Marsember than are, say, Yhaunn or other Sembian ports.

Down the centuries, a brisk smuggling trade has shuttled between Urmlaspyr and Westgate, often involving slaves and always involving drugs, poisons, wines, and spirits. This trade route even gained a nickname; even persons who know nothing of the shadier side of trade that travels this route now know it as "the Swift Thrust."[4]

Various sinister cabals and ambitious individuals have tried to control or at least dominate the Swift

TM & © 2013 Wizards of the Coast LLC. All rights reserved.

Thrust from either end. Despite covert support from Sembian nobles and the rulers of Westgate for some of these would-be smuggling lords, none of these erstwhile commanders have ruled for long.

One of the latest—and least likely—of these so-called "Thrust Lords" is a smiling half-orc (according to some tavern tales, *the* Smiling Half-Orc) named Alsimur Droon.

Alsimur was born to a remarkably beautiful (by human standards, despite her long teeth and burlier-than-most-men build) orc mother, Sonshra Longclaw, and a shrewd, far-traveled human father, the Urmlassan manygoods merchant Ulivarr ("OOL-ih-var") Droon.[5] He spent a wild childhood scrambling around the docks, spying and stealing and learning the ways of sailors and merchant shipping.

Through cruelty, agility, and blackmail, he rose at an early age to command one of the dockside gangs of street urchins. He showed them how to win comfortable shelter, good food, and coins to spend by defending warehouses and spying for merchants rather than by stealing from those warehouses and running from those same merchants.

Two years later, Alsimur's gang had eliminated smaller gangs and broken their chief rivals through a little war that left Alsimur's the only thieving gang on Urmlaspyr's docks.[6] Alsimur promptly expanded into a service for respectable (and wealthier) Urmlassans who knew nothing of the docks: guarding precious goods from their doors to ships' holds or vice versa against "those vicious dockside gangs" for extra fees.

Through all of this, Alsimur exhibited a smiling charm and a sense of fair play that made him a respected local power. Remembered by most as "that smiling half-orc," he became important in Urmlaspyr while being almost ignored in Westgate. He was known to Swift Thrust users but was easily avoided and thus not worth eliminating. He was also useful, because he could control the traditionally bold thievery of starving younglings.

Then Alsimur had his bright idea and started his rise to power. He became the Arranger of Shortages.

## The Arranger

Alsimur Droon came to realize, as he escaped attempt after attempt to kill him—from hurled daggers to poisonings—that sooner or later, someone who wanted him removed from the docks of Urmlaspyr and his increasing dominance of the Swift Thrust was going to succeed in eliminating him.[7] Success in life wasn't, Droon realized, about dominating and fighting or even hard dealing—it was about making the most money with the least effort, and without making enemies every step of the way. The best way to do that was to cause or rekindle distant wars, feuds, and bridge collapses, not to mention motivating bands of what he deemed to be "convenient" brigands.

Ruthless merchants have always overcharged when folk are desperate, and these folk are not above spreading desperation by inflaming wars and by using arson and theft as tools. Thus they cause shortages of necessary items to trigger sharp rises in prices. A merchant who stocked up on those commodities before prices spiked was guaranteed rich profits.

Droon discovered the key when a group of sick and wounded traders collapsed in one of his warehouses. In return for providing them food, shelter, and healing, Droon picked their brains about conditions across the Heartlands, then made private proposals to them that they accepted.

Thus began a cabal of what Droon called "hands and eyes of the Arranger." His traveling agents sabotage bridges, sponsor brigands, and goad uneasy peace into renewed strife between rival families, guilds, towns, and realms. Droon handed over the daily running of his warehouses and dockside gang to a subordinate and disappeared from Urmlaspyr,[8] only to reappear all over the Heartlands, moving constantly. Wherever his agents arranged shortages,[9] he would arrive shortly after with the goods that were suddenly and sorely needed, time after time, in the nick of time—and crucially, ahead of all competitors.[10]

## Droon's Plans

Alsimur Droon is now concentrating on what bulk shippers need. So, wagon wheels and axles, drover chains,[11] and bulk feed for oxen and draft horses are vanishing from specific locales across the Realms—locales Droon's agents swiftly arrive in, shortly thereafter, with supplies of whatever is lacking.

Additionally, warehouse fires have broken out, again followed by Droon's agents conveniently showing up with a cargo of bulk timber and roof tiles.

Droon has perfected how far apart such shortages should occur to prevent widespread suspicion falling on him or his agents.

Thus far, no one except a few grumbling caravan traders have connected Droon's arrivals with sudden shortage. The most vocal of those grumblers have suffered fatal "accidents." Droon knows he might soon need to refine his methods to settle on more profitable and "innocent beyond reproach" shortages.[12]

Just in case he gets caught first, Droon is now hiring adventurers (on other pretexts, as bodyguards or caravan escorts) to safeguard his veteran agents and to add muscle to his ever-expanding reach.

## Notes

1. "A respectable many in number" is the famous phrase used by Ahghairon to remind the nobles of Waterdeep that just because a majority of nobles and guildmasters want something doesn't mean dissenters among the citizenry can be ignored, time and time again, without consequences. "Benefits for all turn aside unrest and worse" was another phrase he used later in the same speech. In Elminster's opinion, this is "advice rulers in the Realms ignore at their eventual peril."

2. Elminster said, "As those in power care little or nothing for the lives of the lowly, anyone who rises out of the ranks of common citizenry seems to soar into existence 'out of nowhere,' their ascension all too often blamed on the whims of the gods rather than their own aspirations or achievements."

3. This is a reference to those of Shade, but before their appearance in Sembian politics, there were darker rulers in the form of the most powerful merchant costers and their hired bullyblades, who had great influence in noble-dominated Saerloon and Selgaunt but far less in Urmlaspyr, where the relative scarcity of nobles meant many small merchant cabals flourished. There, attempts by the costers to muscle in met with endless resistance.

4. A term believed to have been coined by the bard Alaskrus "Sharptongue," who put it into the mouth of his character Swindlepurse in his satirical play *Ravelos the Magnificent* (first performed 1359 DR) in the following lines (Act I, Scene III):

*Ravelos:* How now? What's that?

*Swindlepurse:* Ah, I can get it for you cheaper and faster. By my next swift thrust, from here to the Gates of the West, I send word—and from there, my best-trusted coin-friends send your requested sword back, by their next swift thrust. All very handy and under the cloak, believe you me. Like a trusted doxy.

*Ravelos:* Names, my friend, I want names! If you've found a doxy you can trust, 'tis a treasure all the city should know!

5. Alsimur's parents are now elderly and increasingly stay-at-home folk but remain vigorous, shrewd local investors and traders. His mother is notorious for hiring adventurers when her trading gets dangerous or rivals too difficult.

6. Alsimur's gang was "the Swarmers." The rivals they crushed were the Ironside Claw, and they had previously extinguished Kalasper's Hands and a decades-old local docks gang, the Slow Smile.

7. Droon's favorite eateries, all in dockside Urmlaspyr, were Thaelong Malnamber's Fishskillet on Gut Lane, Silmur's Haven on Straker Alley, and Mindle's Pies on Wagonspur Way. All are cheap, dirty, cluttered shacks that serve hearty fare, not pretentious or refined establishments. Droon's would-be killer poisoned almost every consumable item in the Fishskillet, claiming over sixty lives and resulting in the Fishskillet's first proper cleaning ever. Its staff also tightened up control over food and drink before it is presented to patrons, which may or may not be reassuring to returning patrons.

8. His subordinate was the human Blarm Faronder, a short, ugly, acrobatic, and brutal man. Smugglers who intended to murder Faronder instead maimed him, after which he retired to a life of luxury with a favored widow. In turn, he handed the dockside business over to Tharn Olnar, a grim man who'd grown up on the docks and seen it all.

Tharn "Lacktooth" let it be known that he would cheerfully hunt down any smugglers who tried to kill him, and he would make their deaths slow and painful. He demonstrated that he meant what he said eleven times before the message was really taken to heart.

9. Droon's original agents were four down-on-their-luck, unscrupulous human traders: "Hramble" Hrar Daekyn, formerly of Athkatla; Ongoleir Klassam of Elturel; Marlar Tethnose of Daerlun; and Ulnar Keltur of Urmlaspyr. Keltur was soon killed by local thieves in Scornubel, but the others are flourishing and have been joined by two human females (Droon's casual lovers and very formidable merchants in their own right): Jharandarra Relhand of Scornubel and Scaulbrelle Arnketrel of Suzail. Droon now has many other agents and hirelings, but these five are his full partners, each of them "making coins hand over fist," as Elminster put it, due to local shortage after shortage—lacks they "relieve," as Elminster says, with necessary goods.

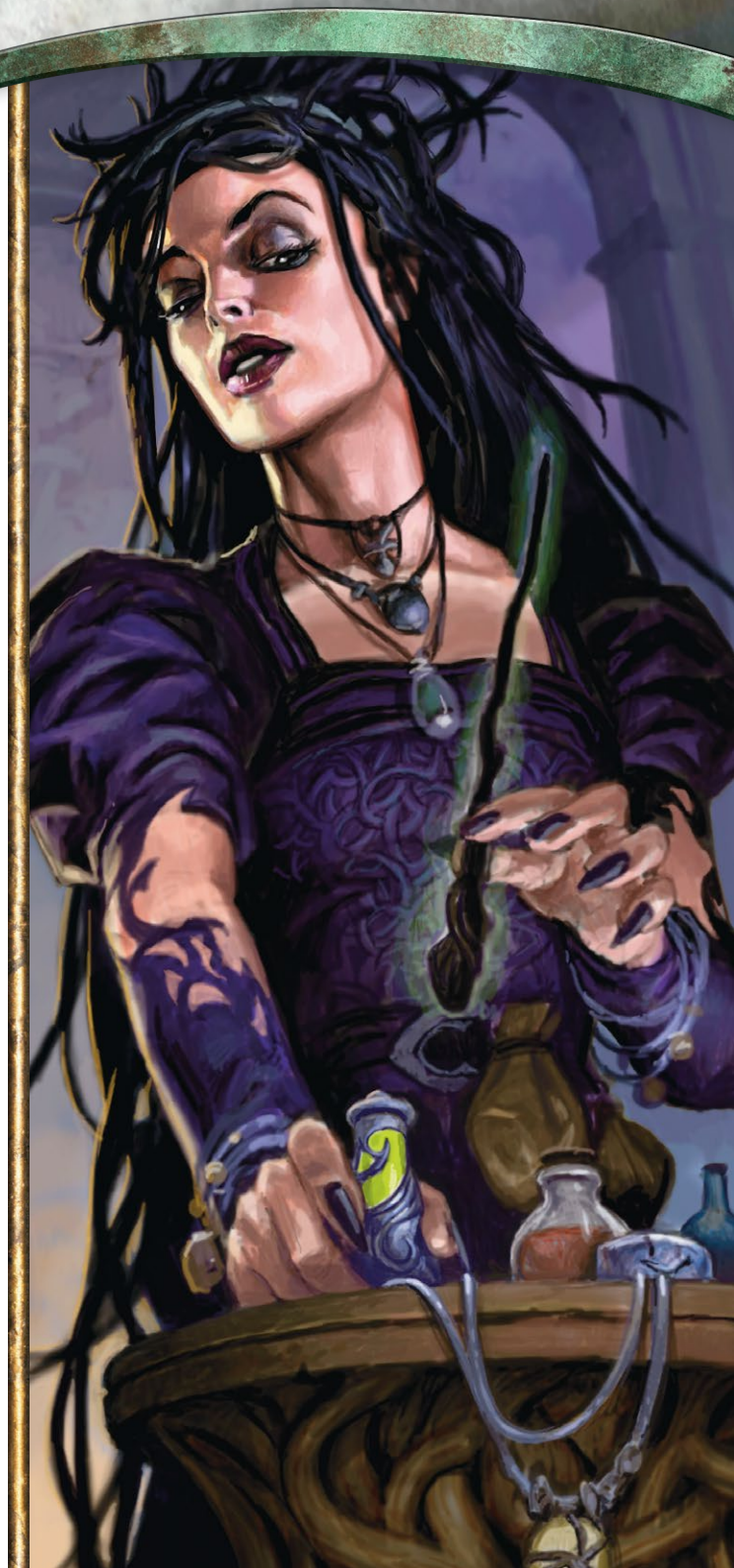
10. Droon caused the recent sudden lack of new ironmongery in the towns and cities along the Heartlands trade routes. Before that, it was the temporary lack of salted-in-the-cask hog meat in independent Sword Coast ports from Waterdeep to the northern border of Calimshan—and before that, the sudden lack of chain, cable, and wire in Impiltur and the lack of bolts of basic textiles around the Moonsea.

11. Drover chains are the chains slung between the body of a wagon and the crosstrees, tongue, and yokes that the animals pulling it are harnessed to; the chains prevent what we might call "jackknifing" or swiveling too far to one side or the other. The term is also applied to the small chains used on many wagons to keep cotter pins (wooden or iron pins that hold wheels on axles) from falling out and being lost. Careful merchants use cotter pins that can be locked in place to prevent theft or sabotage.

12. The "innocent beyond reproach" phrase was uttered by Elminster, who identifies some of the grumblers as the horse merchant Osilant Lharnree of Riatavin, textiles trader Ilbert Nornrust of Iriaebor, and wine shipper Presper Aulimont of Athkatla.

### *About the Author*

**Ed Greenwood** is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which space remains to pile up more papers.



# COMING NEXT MONTH

## SHAKE THE WORLD

***By Steve Townshend***

World-shaking events force conflict. They set new events and power groups in motion and cause things to happen. Their outcomes change the definition of your world by altering the feel and tone of the setting in a meaningful way. They chronicle the story of your world in big, bold print. It's time to shake things up.

## ECOLOGY OF THE KRUTHIK

***By Tim Eagon***

When Turathi beastmasters focused their attention on breeding monstrosities that could breach enemies' defenses and attack from within, they infused the essence of hellish burrowing insects into scytheclaw drakes, thereby creating the first kruthiks. That was the easy part; the hard part was controlling their new creations.

## GHOST OF THE PAST

***By Robert van Wijk and Robert J. Schwalb***

You were born in an age far removed from the present, a citizen of an empire that dominated the world. You witnessed great nations at their height. But now, you are here—or to be more precise, you are now, stuck in this strange, dark age. Do you lament the past you lost and curse this unforeseen future, or do you embrace this new, savage world?

## IT'S ABOUT TIME

***By Peter Schaefer***

For as long as magic has existed, magicians have fooled around with time. Bending it, looping it, finding ways to break it—everyone wants to manipulate this primary constant of the universe. With enough people working on the problem, a few of them are bound to create tools that work. Kind of.

## AND MORE!

D&D®